The Times History

of

The War in South Africa

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COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, WAR OFFICE, JAN., 1901.

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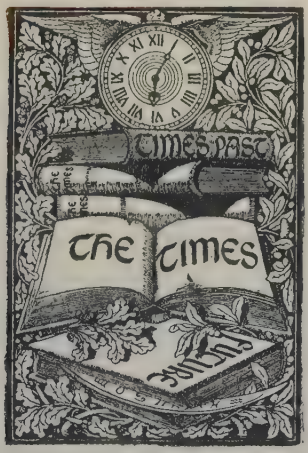
1899–1902



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PREFACE

THE favourable reception accorded three years ago to the second volume of the present work, both by subscribers and by the general public, in spite of the considerable delays which had attended its publication, encouraged me in the belief that I should do right in proceeding on the same lines, and in subordinating all other considerations to the endeavour to produce a thoroughly trustworthy and convincing narrative. Circumstances were, in many ways, more favourable to my undertaking than they had been before. The conclusion of the war enabled me to visit many of the battlefields I had been unable to see during the progress of hostilities, and has since brought within my reach a vast amount of information previously inaccessible. These favouring conditions have not only greatly amplified the evidence available with regard to the details of the various operations, but have given me a much fuller insight into the inner mechanism of the campaign, into the motives and ideas on both sides, of which the struggle on the battlefield was but the outward and visible expression. The result is a volume which, I venture to think, is in many respects a decided improvement upon its predecessor. But the result has only been attained at the cost of a great increase of the labour involved, and of a protracted delay which has, I am well aware, sorely taxed the patience of subscribers.

More than one subscriber, indeed, has written to object

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that this laborious striving after accuracy has been misdirected; that a well-written story, correct as regards the main points, would have served equally well to give a true picture of the war and to bring out the lessons to be drawn from our South African experience; that, in any case, the whole subject has by now largely lost its interest. To these objections I can only reply that the main points are not always the most obvious points, and that a narrative may contain no statements that are not true in fact, and yet fail entirely to give a true picture of events. To arrive at the main points, and to present the true picture in as simple and straightforward a form as possible, this has, indeed, proved the real difficulty and the real cause of delay. Accuracy in minor details, so far as I have secured it, has been, not my primary object, but an incidental consequence of the effort to get at the real truth of events. Again, nothing but a patient and conscientious study of the available evidence would have justified the frankness with which I have ventured to express my criticisms—not in order to impute blame to individuals, but to illustrate the essential lessons of the war—or could possibly have lent certainty of touch and power of carrying conviction to my conclusions. That the lessons of the South African War have ceased to be of importance, that the intensely dramatic events of that great struggle have themselves in any sensible degree lost their interest for us, I cannot believe.

The preceding volume ended with the "Black Week" of defeats which marked the definite failure of the expeditionary force originally thought sufficient for the conquest of the Boer republics. The present volume opens with a series of chapters in which I have attempted to analyse the impression produced by that failure upon all affected by it—upon the people of this country, upon South Africa, upon the British Empire, and upon the outside world—and thus to make clear

the political and moral significance of the struggle, and to bring the chapters dealing with the purely military operations into true perspective. These latter comprise, in the main, the events of the second three months of the war, the period in which defeat was turned into victory. They include the operations round Colesberg, the earlier portion of the siege of Ladysmith down to the attack of January 6, the series of attempts—Spion Kop, Vaal Krantz, Pieter's—by which Sir Redvers Buller finally relieved Ladysmith, and the preparation and execution of Lord Roberts's plan of campaign, with its episodes of the relief of Kimberley, the capture of General Cronje's army, and the march to Bloemfontein. The chapters dealing with the siege of Kimberley and with the closing weeks of the siege of Ladysmith were originally intended to go together with these, but to have included them would have added still more to the already inordinate bulk of the volume, and I have therefore been compelled to hold them over.

The provision of clear and accurate maps has been a matter of no small difficulty. This task I have left almost entirely in the hands of my collaborator, Mr. Lionel James. Only those who have attempted such work themselves can fully appreciate the research, labour, and ingenuity required for the correct and graphic representation of military movements. But even those who have not will, I am sure, feel grateful to him for the great assistance his maps afford to the comprehension of the narrative. The topographical part of the maps has in some instances been provided by special surveys; in others, existing maps have been used as a ground work and modified by the evidence of sketches and photographs. The maps of Spion Kop (general), Vaal Krantz and the Colenso operations have been based on the surveys of Lieutenants Skipwith and Ommaney, and the Ladysmith map on that of Major S. C. N. Grant; and I have to thank

the mapping section of the War Office for their kindness in allowing me to make use of them.

Long as has been the time taken to complete this volume, it would have been much longer if I had not enjoyed the help of several collaborators. The bulk of the research work was done by them, and they contributed the original drafts of all the purely military chapters. As in Volume II., my principal coadjutor has been Mr. Lionel James, to whom this volume owes, besides the maps, the narrative of General French's operations in front of Colesberg and of the siege of Ladysmith (Chapters VI.–VIII.), and a great deal of miscellaneous work in the collection of information. Mr. Bron Herbert has contributed the story of the Natal operations (Chapters IX.–XI. and XVI.), perhaps the most difficult and contentious portion of the whole book. Two contributors, who prefer to remain anonymous, furnished the draft narrative of Lord Roberts's operations (Chapters XIII.–XV. and XVII.). These same chapters have also, in the course of revision, borrowed many hints from the constructive insight and admirably judicious criticisms of the second volume of Mr. F. H. E. Cunliffe's 'History of the Boer War.' Once again I gladly take the occasion to express my thanks to all the officers who have so kindly helped me and my collaborators with information and advice. But for their assistance, indeed, the task would have been impossible.

L. S. AMERY.

LONDON, *May* 3, 1905.

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A General Map of South Africa

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The Medallion on this volume is from the "Queen's Medal" given to the troops who took part in the South African Campaign 1899–1900.

The Times History

OF

THE WAR IN SOUTH AFRICA

CHAPTER I

THE CRISIS AT HOME

British optimism at the outbreak of war.

With a light heart the British nation had taken up the gage of battle flung down by the Republics. Moral doubts and hesitations, springing from a genuine and deep-seated abhorrence of the very thought of war, had perplexed its conscience and weakened its policy during the years and months preceding the inevitable collision. All these had been resolved in an instant by the reckless defiance of President Kruger's ultimatum. Anxiety as to the military issue there was none. Few even believed that the Boers would make any serious or prolonged resistance to the overwhelming advance of the great army that was being launched against them. For it must never be forgotten that it was the magnitude of the force sent, not its insufficiency; the abundant precaution shown in order to insure speedy and complete success, not the lack of some of the veriest rudiments of scientific preparation, that impressed the public mind at the outbreak of war. Judged by the standard of previous wars, this was the largest force of purely British troops that had ever been sent over the sea. Compared with the enemy to be encountered, the force almost equalled the total adult male white population of the two Republics. What wonder, then, that a nation profoundly ignorant of all military affairs should enter confidently and light-heartedly upon what seemed so unequal a conflict!

The failure to realize the responsibility of Empire.

The memory of the first Transvaal War ought perhaps to have suggested a warning. But the lessons of 1881 had only been learnt in part. The political mischief and shame of Gladstone's surrender had sunk deeply into the mind of the British people; the military impotence and failure which led to it were overlooked. Instead of studying and planning to secure victory, the nation rested content in the belief that it had only to make up its mind not to surrender again, and all else would follow. It had yet to learn that the great ideals of Empire cannot be sustained by good intentions alone, or even by patriotic improvisation and the lavish expenditure of money in the hour of danger, but only by constant forethought, by sober, purposeful striving, and by efficient organization. Its Imperialism was still tainted with that self-satisfied irresponsibility, that contemptuous ignoring of things as they are, that belief in the power of wealth and large figures in general, and that disbelief in the power of scientific thought and earnest will concentrated upon national objects which the word "jingoism" most nearly expresses. From that taint the dearly-bought experiences of the South African War should have done much to free it—whether enough, future events alone can show.

Effect of the first reverses.

The first tidings of unsuccess were received in England with calmness. They were only to be expected, so people reassured each other, at the beginning of a war. That was the British way of doing things. Meanwhile, the main army was on its way; its chosen commander had already landed; all would soon be well. But gradually, as fuller news of the first phase of the campaign in Natal reached home, while at the same time the investing cordon was drawn closer round Kimberley and Ladysmith, and while a similar fate seemed at one time even to threaten the forces at Estcourt and Mooi River, a feeling of uneasiness began to spring up. For a moment, in the opening days of December, when practically the whole of the original expeditionary force had landed and was pushing forward at every point, this feeling was lulled into security. Then followed in quick succession the three stinging blows of Stormberg, Magersfontein and Colenso. With each reverse

hope concentrated more intensely upon the forces that were still to engage. With Colenso the last hope of easy victory vanished.

The Black Week. The awakening to the issues involved.

The week that followed marked a crisis in the life of the British nation and of the Empire. There were no outward signs of panic, no unreasoning clamour for the recall of the generals, no denunciation of the Government. Englishmen remained true to their reputation for constancy and self-control in adverse circumstances. All the same, the nation was more deeply stirred, more profoundly alarmed, than perhaps at any period since the eve of Trafalgar. It was not the magnitude of the defeats in themselves that could make this impression. Three severe checks, involving nearly 3,000 casualties, were no doubt a shock to a generation accustomed to the cheap military glories of savage warfare. But that shock only formed an element in the current of the national emotion. Its real significance lay in the sudden comprehension of what those checks might imply. The eyes of the nation were opened, and it now saw how slight and uncertain was the reserve of military power on which the British Empire, with all its great extent of territory, its population and its wealth, was based. Ten days before the irresistible march to Pretoria was to have begun the scattered fragments of the expeditionary force had been beaten at every point. What other army was there ready to hand? What organization had been elaborated beforehand to bring a reserve force into being? The fate of Ladysmith, Kimberley and Mafeking, perhaps even of the troops already in the field in South Africa, depended not upon statistics of area, population or wealth, but solely upon the armed and trained men that could be put in the field against the Boers within the next few weeks. If they proved insufficient, what chance was there of regaining the lost ground? And, failing decisive victory, what settlement would follow that would not mark the beginning of the end of the Empire? For without the confidence of the colonies in the power and determination of England to defend colonial interests, without the confidence of England in her own strength, what hope was there of ever realizing

that great conception of Imperial unity which in recent years had been gradually coming to be the supreme political ideal of the nation and the religion of many of its leading men? The invisible bonds of Empire, that had grown so much stronger of late, would rapidly loosen again. England would be left to stand alone, and, standing alone, her downward path was clearly marked out—and all for no other cause than the sudden breakdown of an inadequate military system in face of the resistance of a few thousand farmers.

The need for more men.

The causes of that breakdown have been set forth at sufficient length in the last volume. The want of any real co-ordination between our policy and our military preparations, the neglect of the measures necessary to secure adequate information, the false strategic distribution of our forces at the outbreak of war, the absence of a General Staff or a proper staff system, the defective peace training of officers and men, had borne their fruit in disaster on the field of battle. How was that disaster to be retrieved? The time for organization, training and preparation, had gone by. All that was left was to lose no time in finding the best generals and, above all, in sending out more troops. Overwhelming numerical superiority alone could now make up for those failings that no improvisation could remedy. Numerical insufficiency, indeed, had not been the real cause of our disasters, but it was their natural consequence, and for the moment the question of numbers was supremely important.

Bankruptcy of the existing military organization.

The strength of the force in South Africa had already been increased considerably above the numbers thought sufficient before the war broke out. The wastage of casualties and disease had been balanced by a steady stream of drafts. Three battalions and a mountain battery were ordered out to replace the losses of Nicholson's Nek. A fifth division was called out on November 11th when it became known that Sir R. Buller had diverted a division to Natal, and began to arrive in South Africa from the middle of December onwards, in time to counteract some of the moral impression of the recent defeats. A sixth division was

ordered after Modder River and a seventh after Magersfontein. The former was just beginning to sail as the tidings of reverse were received in England; the latter would not be ready till early in January. A siege train of thirteen companies of garrison artillery (four from the Mediterranean), with heavy guns and howitzers, and four more brigade divisions of field artillery, were sent out about the same time. In all, some 85,000 men, including the Seventh Division, had been sent out of England since the war began. That left nearly 100,000 regulars still in the country, after the calling out on December 17th of the whole of the first class reserve, an ample margin, one might think, for further reinforcements. After making all due allowances for recruits and invalids, for permanent staffs and garrison forces, it would not be unreasonable to expect that a net field force of from 40,000 to 50,000 men, say four infantry divisions with proportionate complements of the other arms, should still have been available. Unfortunately no such force existed. In the first place, nearly 40 per cent. of this outwardly imposing paper army of 100,000 men consisted of fully paid regular soldiers who, owing to extreme youth or deficient physique, were altogether unfit for foreign service. And worse still, if 40 per cent. were individually useless, nearly double that proportion was useless collectively—a mere mob of men in uniform, unorganized and unofficered. Of the *cadres* existing in peace, only fourteen battalions of infantry and ten regiments of cavalry were left in the country. Reserve *cadres* there were none, for there were no officers.* Even had the officers and men been available, the necessary equipment of guns, harness, saddlery, clothing, for another four divisions would not have been forthcoming. The provision of the reserve, whether of officers or of equipment, indispensable in order to secure complete mobilization—in other words, to get full value out of the costly force kept up by the country—was a measure which a wasteful and improvident system had never yet been able to afford.

* See Evidence War Commission I. 4125, where Sir E. Wood quotes the case of one officer having to look after 850 men divided between Aldershot and Hounslow.

Possible emergency measures. The exclusion of India.

In the absence of any proper prevision, the only thing for the Government to do was to have recourse to emergency measures. All existing cavalry and infantry units should have been despatched at once. As for the unorganized remainder, it was possible either to make use of the few thousand fit men among them in order to stiffen such Militia battalions as might be induced to volunteer for active service, or simply to send them out, as they were, to swell the size of their units in South Africa. The re-enlisting of old soldiers and the offering of a substantial bounty to recruits of an age and physique suitable for immediate embarkation and possessed of some knowledge of arms, enlisting them only for the period of the campaign, might rapidly have supplied fresh reinforcements. Meanwhile the whole of the Militia could be called under arms, the Volunteers encouraged to strengthen and improve themselves, and every possible appeal made to the patriotism of both forces to induce as many as possible of them to volunteer as units, or failing that as individuals, for service in South Africa. From the purely military point of view, indeed, the simplest and most obvious step was to send 40,000 or 50,000 trained men from India, raising new troops in England to take their place. But there were serious objections. To have withdrawn so large a part of the British troops, even for a few months, would certainly have been a risky policy, and however justifiable on broad grounds of Imperial strategy, would never have been acquiesced in by the Government of India. On the other hand, the use of native Indian soldiers would have been contrary to the decision of the Government only to employ white troops, a decision fully justified by consideration for South African sentiment and for the political future of the country. Moreover, from the broadest point of view, the danger of the British Empire is lest, like the Roman Empire of old, it should come to rely too much on the fighting qualities of its subject races, and should allow the military spirit of the ruling race to decline. Regarded in this light, the South African War, which was fought entirely by the soldiers and volunteers of the dominant race—the first great war so fought since Agincourt—may perhaps by future historians

be reckoned as one of the most bracing influences in the course of our national life.

The resolve to see the war through without the use of coloured troops made it all the more imperative to make every effort to raise and despatch fresh forces from home. The occasion was ripe for almost any measure. The nation was in a mood to respond to every demand that might be made upon it. Had our military affairs been directed by any one who had thought out an effective national system, but had hitherto been unable to carry it into execution, now was the moment for establishing its main outlines by a series of bold emergency measures. But such men are not easily produced by the existing political system with its glorification of hand-to-mouth policy, and they were not to be found in this crisis. The Government was still far from rising to the magnitude of the occasion. It had dribbled troops out by divisions during the last few weeks, and even after Colenso it had no real plan beyond the sending of Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener to take over the supreme command. Instead of working upon national emotion while it was at white heat and forging it to their own purposes, the chief object of ministers seems to have been to calm the public excitement, to minimise the dangers of the situation, and to make much of the preparations already made, or the feeble emergency measures that were being announced. Nothing can reflect graver discredit on this passivity of the Government than the fact that not one of the measures it took to cope with the situation evoked any strong and widespread protests. For when one considers what is the natural temper of a people that has not seen serious war for nearly fifty years, that absence of protest can only have meant that the Government was not doing its duty—not doing it as, for instance, President Lincoln did when, after the earlier reverses of the Civil War, he enforced conscription upon the North in the face of the very fiercest opposition. So far from leading or coercing the nation, as in duty bound, it waited for a lead from without, and such action as it did take was due quite as much to the exhortations of the Press and the agitation

The opportunity for bold reforms neglected.

of informal committees of patriotic citizens as to its own initiative and resolution.

Feebleness of the Government.

The speeches of ministers during the next few weeks and the debates in Parliament that followed can only be read now with perplexed amazement. Amid much patriotic verbiage about the gallantry of our soldiers and the splendid fortitude of the nation, the argument of their discourses was chiefly to the effect that the Government had done all its military advisers had asked it, and had never interfered with the generals in the field, that things could not well have happened otherwise, and that the forces now sent out were quite sufficient to achieve complete success. Mr. Balfour's singularly complacent series of addresses delivered in Manchester early in January—all the more singular because of the courageous part he had played in the councils of the Government just before—provoked widespread dissatisfaction. Equally ill-timed were Lord Salisbury's cynical criticisms, when Parliament opened towards the end of January, on the inefficiency of the British Constitution for the purpose of conducting warlike operations.* The secret of their conduct lay in the system in which they had been brought up. Momentous though the crisis was, they were no more able to shake themselves free from their habitual attitude of party defence, face the facts, and stand forward as the rulers of a great nation, than the generals in the field had been able to shake off the mental fetters of Pall Mall and Aldershot and show themselves great military leaders. By inveterate habit, their eyes were fixed on their opponents in Parliament. They still saw things not as they were but as they appeared through the distorting mirage of Parliamentary debate. Their arguments were addressed not to guiding and inspiring the nation, but to meeting or anticipating the charges of the Opposition.

Feebleness of the Opposition. National impatience.

The Opposition, indeed, played an even feebler part during this crisis than the Government itself. A small but influential section were prepared freely to support the Government in any measures it might take and to reserve all criticism for the

* *Cf.* Carlyle's 'Frederick the Great,' bk. xii. ch. 12, for a striking description of Walpole's attitude towards the early reverses of the Spanish War in 1741.

present. An equally small but noisier group, comprising the anti-war idealists and the political extremists of every shade, indulged in violent denunciations of the injustice and wickedness of the war. With these went the Irish Nationalists, who welcomed the war as supplying fresh food for their campaign of denunciation against the British Government and openly expressed their exultation at the Boer successes. The bulk of the Liberal Party, admirably typified in their leader, Sir H. Campbell-Bannerman, wobbled flabbily hither and thither in their anxiety to share the credit for patriotism of the one wing without foregoing any political capital that might be made by the methods of the other. Among public men, Lord Rosebery stood almost alone in urging the seriousness of the crisis and the necessity for thoroughgoing measures. But unfortunately his vague warnings, unaccompanied by definite suggestions and unsupported by continuous effort, fell fruitless. The nation as a whole watched the proceedings of its political leaders with unconcealed impatience. The unreal and unedifying discussions in Parliament filled ordinary men with a strong conviction of the unfitness of the House of Commons to manage Imperial affairs, a conviction without immediate tangible result but destined in course of time to have its effect upon the constitutional development of the Empire. Had there been found any one man to stand out above his fellows and play the part of a Chatham, the faults of the political system might have been obscured by practical success. But the only man on either side who possessed the natural gifts which might have made him a successful War Minister, Mr. Chamberlain, was tied by the heavy work of his own department, and by the prospect of heavier work when the war ended. And so the political machine went jumbling on, trying to conduct war as if it were a side issue of ordinary peace administration, and not the one object and end of the national existence for the time being, and displaying all the feebleness in action and lack of foresight that tend to characterize party government, without any of the stimulating effect that, in peace, party discussion has upon the political intelligence of the nation.

Early offers of voluntary help.

In default of any one to organize it, the nation attempted to organize itself. Offers of voluntary assistance had, from the very outbreak of war, been made to the War Office by the leading members of the auxiliary forces. As early as August, 1899, Sir Howard Vincent, commanding the Queen's Westminster Volunteers, offered to raise, at his own expense, a special battalion of volunteers for active service. About the same time Colonel Eustace Balfour, commanding the London Scottish, offered to raise a company from his regiment to be attached to the Gordon Highlanders. Early in October Colonel Lucas suggested to the War Office the mobilization of a composite regiment of Yeomanry for service in South Africa. Similar offers were made a month later by Lord Lonsdale, who offered to equip and transport a thousand men, by Lord Harris, commanding the East Kent Yeomanry, by the Middlesex Yeomanry, and others. These offers, originally made not so much with any idea that the proffered assistance might be seriously needed, as in the hope that the volunteer forces might be given an opportunity of showing what they could do, were renewed from time to time during the opening weeks of the war. They were declined by the authorities, whose opinion of the auxiliary forces was of the lowest, and who refused to contemplate the possibility of reverses that might lead to a demand for large reinforcements. To the suggestion that it should at least issue regulations for the special enlistment of volunteers in accordance with the Act of 1895* the War Office had no better reply than that such volunteers would not be required till the Militia reserve was exhausted, and that as there was no immediate prospect of this, such a step could only "raise false hopes."† One might have supposed that, without

* Allowing volunteers to offer themselves for active service at any time when the order embodying the Militia is in force.

† The fact is that the permission to volunteers to go to the front was only accorded reluctantly as a privilege which they hardly deserved and for which they ought to be very grateful—as indeed they were. Thus Lord Albemarle, in addressing the C.I.V. infantry on parade just before their departure, could say: "The Volunteer movement had culminated in a great honour done to the Volunteer force . . . they had actually been accepted for active service on the field of battle."

"raising false hopes," some scheme could have been quietly elaborated at the War Office, but nothing of the sort was done. For one thing there was no one to do it. There had never been a proper staff to look after the auxiliary forces in peace time, and it was difficult to create one amid the general confusion and overwork of war. But the main reason was that neither the Government nor, consequently, the War Office, had ever seriously contemplated the possibility of a war which might necessitate the raising of emergency troops, or had considered that, in such an emergency, any use might be made of the auxiliary forces.

Attitude of Government in sanctioning such help.

When on December 18 the Government announced that it would allow twelve battalions of Militia to volunteer for service abroad and embody an equivalent number at home, and would sanction the formation of a "strong" force of volunteers from the Yeomanry and a contingent of carefully selected Volunteers for South Africa, it took a step which, at any rate in its original intention, was quite as much political as military. In taking that step it looked less towards crushing the Boers than towards allaying public excitement in England—less towards devising a new engine of war than towards providing a safety-valve to ease off the pent-up feelings of the nation. It is impossible to understand the genesis and formation of the volunteer force which sprang up during the weeks following the crisis of the Black Week without keeping in mind clearly that the attitude of the Government and War Office towards the national movement was permissive, if not actually restrictive, and that the force raised was the resultant, not of the concerted energies of the nation directed by its natural leaders, but of the friction between the unorganized enthusiasm of public-spirited individuals and the passive resistance of the recognized authorities. Flattering references to the patriotism of the nation's volunteers there were plenty, but it would be difficult to find a single utterance of responsible ministers during that period which could be construed as a deliberate effort to stir up the national enthusiasm, to encourage waverers, or to rebuke the faint-hearted.

As regards the details of the raising of the volunteer

Attitude of the War Office.

contingents, the attitude of the military authorities was governed by the predominant desire to turn the energies of the volunteers, which the politicians insisted on their accepting, into such directions as would give least trouble in the way of organization. The spirit that animated them was in its essence the same as that which had inspired the famous "dismounted preferred" telegram to the colonies. Let them come if they insisted on it, but not more than could be helped, and let them give as little trouble as possible. Instead of trying to secure all the capable men who were ready to come forward, and equipping and organizing them themselves, they laid down certain fixed rules for units, allowed a certain sum for equipment, and complacently awaited the result. A vast mass of patriotic energy which might have displayed itself in personal service, either abroad or at home, was thus frittered away in the organizing of county funds, and the buying of horses, uniforms and accoutrements in competition with the War Office. The desired end was undoubtedly attained. The overworked War Office was not worried by the task of organizing and despatching large bodies of half-trained or untrained men. The nation was kept in a state of bustling activity and abstained largely from criticism during the most anxious weeks of the war. And lastly, not more than some 20,000 volunteers—out of two or three times that number who might have been secured if that had been the object aimed at—managed to carry through their purpose of serving their country.

An unwarlike nation.

When we consider the depth and intensity of the national emotion about the war we might reckon even 100,000 volunteers a disappointingly small fraction out of a population of forty millions. But we must not forget that the British nation had in recent generations become absolutely unwarlike. The most elementary proficiency in the use of firearms was practically confined to the members of the volunteer forces, and it is only from men who feel that they can be of some service that volunteers can be expected, even in the most patriotic nation. There can be little doubt that under an equal stress of patriotic emotion a little people

like the Swiss would have found many more volunteers than the English, for the simple reason that the number of men who can march, skirmish, and shoot is larger in Switzerland than in the United Kingdom. If British statesmen really cherish the hope that they can find the necessary reserve of strength for the emergency of a great war in the voluntary patriotism of their fellow countrymen, they must make that voluntary patriotism possible by compulsorily extending the knowledge of the use of arms to the whole manhood of the nation.

Absence of prevision.

In discussing the attitude of the War Office, it is necessary to remember first of all that there was no scheme for the use of the volunteer forces for foreign service prepared beforehand, and no staff available to work such a scheme. Here again the cause is to be found in the absence of a scientifically trained department specially devoted to the thinking and planning for such emergencies and responsible for drawing up a scheme, and for seeing that the men existed to work it when the occasion came, in other words in the absence of a General Staff. That absence was no less the cause of the contemptuous disbelief in the value of the volunteers entertained in the War Office—a disbelief which the experience of the war threatened at one moment to supersede in the public mind by an even more dangerous disbelief in the value of training and discipline. A trained staff, judging by the light of historical experience, would have known exactly what value to put upon the auxiliary forces, and have remembered that there are occasions when, in default of highly trained troops, great things can be done with untrained material if its physical and moral quality is good, the supply of it abundant, and the stress of time not too great.

The fear of invasion.

But there was yet another factor that governed the attitude of the Government and the War Office not only as regards the volunteers, but on the whole question of reinforcing the army in South Africa, and that was the anxiety to safeguard the United Kingdom against invasion. It was that anxiety which dominated most of the measures decided upon in Downing Street and Pall Mall during these

months. We see it alike in the measures taken, such as the formation of provisional battalions, the raising of the Royal Reserve Regiment,* and the creation of new batteries of field artillery, and in the measures neglected, such as the failure to despatch to South Africa immediately all available regular units. The international situation was, no doubt, disquieting and dangerous. All the same this concern about the conditional and remote danger of invasion, already provided against by the Navy, at the expense of a due concentration of power at the seat of hostilities was contrary to the most elementary principles of strategy. But if these fears were allowed to play so mischievous a part when a European war was a mere possibility and the Navy was still untouched, one may well ask what likelihood is there of any British Government having the courage in a great war to make a really effective use of its Imperial striking forces, the Navy and the Regular Army, unless the local and temporary defence of these islands is independently and automatically provided for ?

The Imperial Yeomanry.

The particular cause which determined the acceptance of a contingent of Yeomanry, hitherto steadily declined by the War Office, was a telegram from Sir R. Buller, sent on the day after Colenso, asking for 8,000 irregular mounted infantry organized in companies. A conference with some of the leading officers commanding Yeomanry regiments was held at the War Office on December 18, and it was decided to raise, at cavalry rates of pay, 3,000 men, a figure increased later to 8,000, and eventually 10,500. It is open to question whether the most effective proceeding would not have been to have made use of the existing Yeomanry organization as far as possible, and to have called upon the Yeomanry regiments to volunteer for active service as units, bringing them up to war strength, and replacing individuals who were

* How completely home defence predominated in the minds of the authorities is shown by the fact that while in February, 1900, they offered a bounty of £22 for old soldiers enlisting in the Royal Reserve Regiment for home defence, it was not till April, after the crisis was over, that they allowed re-enlistment for foreign service, and then only on condition that those who had already joined the Royal Reserve Regiment should refund the bounty.

unable or unwilling to go by enlisting for the term of the war any one who could ride and shoot. By this means the Yeomanry would have been put on their mettle, and the units would have gone out with a certain corps sentiment, which distinguished performance in the field might have intensified into a valued possession for the future. The War Office, however, decided to follow Buller's suggestion exactly, and to raise a number of companies of mounted infantry organized entirely for the occasion. The raising and organization of the force was mainly entrusted to officers connected with the existing Yeomanry, and it was hoped that a good many yeomen would join, but not more than half the permanent staff of a Yeomanry unit was allowed to volunteer. As a matter of fact, though the Yeomanry supplied a valuable element, in actual numbers only 1,898, or less than one-fifth of the whole, joined this emergency force, which might with almost equal propriety have been styled the Volunteer Mounted Infantry.

The Yeomanry Committee.

As regards the raising, equipment, and despatch of the force, the War Office undertook to provide the men with rifle, bayonet, and ammunition, and to find tents and land transport for them in South Africa. All the rest—the purchasing of horses and horse equipment, of uniforms, the mobilization, and even the securing of sea transport—was delegated to a Committee of influential and patriotic gentlemen to manage as best they could. This Committee, which since December 19 had provisionally consisted of Colonel Lucas, Lord Chesham, and Lord Valentia, was formally constituted * by an Army Order of January 4. The Committee was practically a little amateur War Office of its own, and the Imperial Yeomanry was intended to be, for all

* The Imperial Yeomanry Committee was composed as follows:—Colonel Lucas, general supervision; Mr. E. W. Beckett, M.P., finance; Lord Valentia, Colonel the Hon. H. Crichton, and Lieut.-Colonel H. Le Roy Lewis, enrolment and establishment; Colonel St. Quintin and Lord Lonsdale, remounts and saddlery; Captain the Hon. W. L. Bagot, clothing and equipment; Lord Harris, assisted by Rear-Admiral Sir John Hext and Lieut.-General A. R. Badcock, transport and shipping. Mr. W. Long, M.P., and Lord Chesham were on the Committee, but had no defined functions.

purposes almost, except those of actual fighting, absolutely separate from the forces raised by the War Office. It was an extraordinary arrangement, typically British alike in its disregard of all formal organization and in the splendid energy with which the members of the Committee threw themselves into their work.

The lack of co-ordination.

Unprepared, short-handed, and overworked as the War Office was, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that if it had really believed in the value of this Yeomanry force, and been anxious to secure the largest force possible, it would in one way or another have taken the business in hand itself, if necessary by incorporating the energies of the leaders of the Yeomanry movement into its own framework. The only direction in which the authorities did endeavour to exercise a rigid control was in insisting on the Yeomanry companies being organized exactly on the lines of an ordinary mounted infantry company, and in trying to keep down the numbers.* In other words the authorities interfered most where their interference was unnecessary or harmful, and left alone the matters where unified organization was most essential. As a matter of fact the system of a separate army broke down very largely in practice. From the very first the absurdity of the Yeomanry Committee making its own shipping arrangements independently of the Admiralty caused it to be abandoned.† The base and remount depôts at Cape Town were before long absorbed by the Imperial authorities, and the separate stores of necessary military articles were also eventually merged in the common stock of the army in South Africa. The independent purchasing

* With the very greatest difficulty the Committee persuaded the War Office to sanction the 608 men required for a base depot at Cape Town for a force which by the end of February had grown to 10,000 men, and 1,000 men for drafts; three weeks later, under the influence of so partial a success as the occupation of Bloemfontein, this sanction was revoked and an attempt made to cut down the total to 10,000, which was compromised to 10,500 when the Committee showed that it had already recruited over that figure. The actual total up to July 1 was, however, 10,921 men and 13,512 horses.

† For one thing the Committee discovered that they, as private individuals, could not ship their men and horses together without coming into conflict with the provisions of the Merchant Shipping Act.

of remounts, saddlery, clothing, and equipment did not conduce to economy. In fact the only economy in the scheme was that the War Office did not pay for all the necessary military expenses of the various corps, but that these were partly met by charitable contributions. Without the County Funds, and without the £50,000 given by Messrs. Wernher, Beit & Co., which formed practically the whole of the Central Yeomanry Fund, there can be no doubt that the force could never have been raised or equipped as rapidly as it was, for the War Office allowance of £25 (afterwards raised to £35) per man and £40 per horse, though higher than the cost of equipping the ordinary soldier through the Government departments, by no means covered all the items that were really military necessaries.

Public enthusiasm.

The announcement of the formation of the Yeomanry provoked immense enthusiasm all over the country. The central office in Suffolk Street, Strand, and the local recruiting depôts were besieged by large crowds composed in the main of a class of men far above the ordinary army recruit: skilled operatives, clerks, farmers, "younger sons," and even a considerable number of men of high rank and position. The Duke of Norfolk, recognised head of the Roman Catholic community in England, enlisted, as an example to his co-religionists, and as an answer to the violently anti-English attitude of the clerical party on the Continent. Of the twenty-two peers and twenty-seven members of the House of Commons whose patriotism sent them into the field, over three-quarters went as Yeomanry officers. One company, the Duke of Cambridge's Own, was composed entirely of men who paid their own way out, and devoted their pay to the Widows and Orphans' Fund. Patriotic Englishmen hurried home from British Columbia, from Chile, from China, from every end of the world, in the hope of being allowed to serve their country. In one case a whole family of six brothers enlisted. The standard for physique, shooting, and horsemanship was high, but if the War Office had wished it, there would have been no difficulty in raising at that moment two or three times the number of men, without any appreciable loss of

quality, and there were thousands of others, unskilled in riding or shooting, but of excellent physique and intelligence, who would gladly have come forward if any arrangement had been made for accepting their services and training them. Not only did the central committee work with rare energy, but every local centre competed eagerly in order to be the first to have its company raised, equipped, and ready for starting. Over 1,500 yeomen embarked between January 27 and the end of the month, 3,400 in February, an equal number in March, and the last contingent sailed from Southampton on April 14.

Yeomanry organization. The special corps.

The original intention was to group the companies into four company battalions, and the staff of the force was organized on this assumption. But, as was the case with the original Army Corps, and as will always be the case with organizations put together at the last moment, the nominal organization never had any existence in practice. The different companies were sent out as they were equipped; on landing they were sent up country, as mounted men were required, and though they were again reconstituted into two brigades, one with Lord Methuen and the other attached to General Rundle's force, it was not long before these once more succumbed to the exigencies of events, and eventually there was hardly a column or force that had not with it its quota of Yeomanry. Besides the companies directly organized by the Yeomanry Committee, several special corps were organized independently by private persons, but assimilated in constitution to the Yeomanry companies, and affiliated to the central organization. The Duke of Cambridge's Own, raised by Lord Donoughmore, has already been referred to. There was also a battalion (18th) of sharpshooters raised by the Earl of Dunraven, "Paget's Horse" (19th battalion), raised by Mr. George Paget, the "Roughriders" (20th battalion), raised by Lord Lathom, six Irish companies, and the 77th (Manchester) Company. Similar in constitution, but not affiliated, were Lord Lovat's Scouts and Lord Loch's contingent of men with South African experience. A number of other offers to raise and equip corps were also made, but on conditions which the

General Piet. A. Cronje,

Member of the Executive Council of the S. African Republic.

Photo by B. Grant, St. Helena.

Yeomanry Committee and the War Office did not see their way to accept. Of the doings of the Yeomanry in the field there will be plenty to tell in the later volumes. For the present it is enough to say that the high quality, intellectual, moral and physical, of the men enabled them within a remarkably short time to make up for their lack of previous training, and brought them, before their year of service was out, fully up to a level with the best mounted troops in South Africa.

The City Imperial Volunteers.

In calling for volunteers from the Volunteer Infantry, the War Office proceeded on the same general principles that influenced them in the selection of the Imperial Yeomanry, namely, the creating of new composite units in preference to making use of existing corps. Next to the Imperial Yeomanry, no corps that went out to the war attracted so much attention as the City Imperial Volunteers. The origin of the force is to be found in an interview which took place on the afternoon of December 15 between Lord Wolseley and Mr. (now Sir A.) Newton, the Lord Mayor of London. At this interview a scheme was drawn up for submission to Lord Lansdowne, by which the City offered to raise, equip and transport to the front, at its own cost, a corps of 1,000 picked marksmen from the various Volunteer regiments in the London area, not more than twenty to be taken from any one regiment.* On the following day the Lord Mayor was informed that the offer was accepted. Large subscriptions flowed in freely, including £25,000 from the Common Council of the City, and over £65,000 of the necessary £100,000 was subscribed within four days. The Union-Castle Company offered to take out 500 officers and men free of charge; Messrs. A. & C. Wilson, of Hull, offered a ship to convey 550. It was decided, following the precedent of 1759, to present the freedom of the City to all members of the force. The greatest enthusiasm prevailed, and in the end the whole force sent out, of which the first drafts embarked on January 13, amounted to some 1,740 men, selected from 47 different Volunteer corps. These

* This limit was, however, exceeded, and in several cases nearly forty were allowed to join from one battalion.

included 400 mounted infantry and a battery of 12½-pounder Vickers-Maxim quickfirers, manned by the Honourable Artillery Company.* The average age of the infantry was twenty-four, and the average height 5 feet 8 inches, and in this respect, as well as in social standing, the members of the force were much above the average of the ordinary regular. But splendid corps as the C.I.V. were, and fully as the members of it individually deserved the enthusiastic send-off and welcome home that was given to them, it would be absurd to make out that 1,740 men was a very great result to show for the patriotic energies of a population of five millions. The fault lay not in any real want of patriotism, but in the lack of military training in all but an insignificant portion of the whole, in the absence of the conception of the duty of personal service, and in the passive obstruction of the authorities; in other words, in the inherent defects of our national organization.

The service companies.

Besides the formation of the C.I.V., the War Office authorized the formation of service companies of Volunteers to be attached to regiments at the front to make up for the companies converted into mounted infantry. These were to be 110 strong, with four officers. The scheme was applied with true Procrustean rigidity, without much regard to the number, keenness or efficiency of the Volunteer battalions in particular regimental districts. Several Volunteer battalions offered to go in a body; in others the proportion exceeded 50 per cent.; but such considerations were not allowed to interfere with the scheme. In Liverpool seven Volunteer battalions, in Glasgow four, had to divide one company among themselves. In other cases there were not enough men to form the necessary company. The waiting companies, which the War Office suggested should be formed in case they might be wanted later, were not popular, and only a few were ever formed. In all, some 9,000 Volunteers went

* The command of the whole was given to Colonel W. H. Mackinnon, A.A.G. for the Home District, the command of the infantry—originally offered to Sir Howard Vincent—was, owing to his illness, transferred to Major the Earl of Albemarle, that of the mounted infantry to Major H. C. Cholmondeley, and of the battery to Major G. McMicking.

out in these service companies,* a very small portion of the force that could have been sent if there had been any real appreciation of the need of men or any attempt to strike the iron of public emotion while it was still glowing. In addition to these companies of infantry, the authorities also invited the Volunteer Engineer corps to furnish sections of an officer and 25 men to be attached to companies R.E., and of these over 400 officers and men ultimately went to South Africa. Besides the Honourable Artillery Company, no other organized Volunteer artillery went out, with the exception of the Elswick Battery of 12½-pounder quickfirers, presented by Lady Meux, which, however, was not formed from any existing volunteer organization, but provided and manned entirely by the Elswick Works. Over 200 volunteer artillerymen, however, went out to serve with the regular field artillery. Apart from the Volunteers who actually went to South Africa, so many joined the Volunteers at this critical period in order to strengthen the force available for home defence, that within a year their numbers went up by nearly 50,000 men, an increase accompanied at the same time by a marked increase in general efficiency.†

The Militia.

Amid all the excitement and bustle of raising these new Volunteer forces and service sections, the departure for the front of the Militia attracted comparatively little notice. Battalions were asked if they would go; officers exhorted their men, who almost invariably replied in the affirmative;‡ existing equipment was supplemented by the War Office, and embarkation followed a few days later. The first Militia battalion to leave England since the Crimea, the 3rd Royal West Kent, sailed for Malta to relieve a regular battalion on January 4, and was followed a week later by two more battalions to the same place, one to Egypt, and eight to South Africa. Another 22 battalions to South Africa

* 16,500 in the whole course of the war. Including the C.I.V. and 6,209 Volunteers who went with the various Yeomanry contingents, the force altogether supplied over 26,000 men.

† Emergency camps for fourteen days' training were attended, during 1900, by 165,000 Volunteers.

‡ Of the first twelve battalions invited only one declined, and only four refusals were received out of forty invited up to the beginning of March,

and one to St. Helena followed in the next two months. In all, 21,000 Militiamen went out to South Africa during 1900, about the same number as the other volunteer contingents added together, and were followed by another 40 battalions later in the war, bringing up the total to 45,000. This output of voluntary patriotism from a force so consistently starved, neglected, and squeezed as the Militia deserves more attention than it has usually received. To some extent, perhaps, it may be accounted for by the fact that, while the officers in many cases stood to gain professionally by active service, the men as a whole were of a class who had less to lose by absence from England than the men who composed the other voluntary contingents. But the chief reason must be sought in the greater belief in the value of the Militia entertained by the authorities, which led them to appeal not only to the patriotism of the individual militiamen, but to the corporate spirit of the battalions, in the closer association of the force with the Regular Army, and in the longer and more systematic training. In other words, the example of the Militia during the South African crisis only reinforces the lesson already indicated by the composition * of the other volunteer contingents, that the voluntary reserve which we have to rely on for great Imperial emergencies will vary directly with the numerical strength and degree of training of the national defence force in this country. National military training is the bed-rock on which alone we can hope to carry through the great struggles which the future may have in store for us.

* Of the Militia and Yeomanry one man in five, of the Volunteers one in fifteen, and of the untrained and unorganized bulk of the male population of fighting age about one man in a thousand came forward in this emergency.

CHAPTER II

THE COLONIES AND THE EMPIRE

Growth of the Imperial ideal.

IMPORTANT as was the effect of the reverses in South Africa upon the mother-country, the participation of the Empire as a whole in the South African War will, as time goes on, stand out more and more clearly as its most signal feature, as the distinguishing mark which will give it its significance in our history. Nations take long to grow and still longer to realize the meaning of their growth. Generations may pass before a people comprehends the drift and purpose of its own feelings and of its own efforts. But the moment comes when its self-consciousness is definitely aroused, and it becomes a living thing in a sense it never knew before. Such a moment, with its realization of a wider and completer national life, came to British people the world over in the closing days of 1899. The vision of a united Empire is not new. When the first British Empire was rent in two by the unwisdom and recklessness of Englishmen and Americans, there were many who sacrificed all for their ideal and sought new homes in the wilderness sooner than acquiesce in successful rebellion. The tradition of the United Empire Loyalists lies deep in the national character of Canada. A century followed during which a new colonial dominion sprang up almost unnoticed in the place of the old. The ideal of Imperial unity, indeed, seemed almost forgotten. Yet it never died altogether, and from about 1880 onwards it began to revive, slowly at first, but with steadily increasing momentum. This is not the place to discuss the various influences that helped to bring about the change, the contraction of the earth by the improvement in communications, the colonial ambitions of other powers, the work of thinkers

or statesmen such as Seeley and Parkin, Beaconsfield, Rosebery, Macdonald, Parkes and Cecil Rhodes. But there is one man whose work in the development of the sentiment of Imperial unity merits closer attention in connection with the events of the South African War.

Mr. Chamberlain at the Colonial Office.

From the moment that Mr. Chamberlain took charge of the Colonial Office in the summer of 1895 a complete change came over the relations of the colonies with the Imperial Government. For the traditional apathetic attitude of the Colonial Office was substituted a deliberate policy of Imperial consolidation, cautious indeed, but none the less definite and consistent. There was no attempt to hurry the colonies, no urging of premature and unworkable schemes. But no occasion that arose was neglected either to interest the colonies in the Empire or to inspire them with the confidence that their affairs were followed by the Secretary of State with insight and sympathy, and their interests loyally defended in the Imperial Cabinet and against foreign nations. The Diamond Jubilee of the Queen, with its display of overwhelming naval strength and its marvellous pageant of troops from every end of the Empire, exercised a profound effect, and in the conferences that then took place between Mr. Chamberlain and the colonial prime ministers one is tempted to trace the germ of the future federal council of the Empire. Nor was the all-important question of Imperial Defence overlooked during these years, and, without direct interference, much was done to induce the colonies to realize the duty of strengthening their own military organizations. And so when the crisis came the Colonial Secretary was able to reap the reward of a deliberate and consistent policy. The Black Week showed how much better the way had been paved for the consolidation of the Empire than for the reform of the British military system.

The war a crucial test of Imperial sentiment.

That the welding together of the Empire could only come about under the stress of external pressure and at the temperature of some great emotion, had long been foreseen by thoughtful students of affairs.* Few, indeed, can

* Two striking expressions of opinion communicated to the editor by Dr. G. R. Parkin are worth recording. Speaking to the latter in 1889,

have imagined the particular form this consolidating stress was to assume, and it was, no doubt, to some struggle with a great European power or coalition of powers, such as England went through in Napoleonic times, that the apprehension and hope of most earnest Imperialists was directed. Such a struggle may still, perhaps, be necessary to complete the work done by the war in South Africa. Yet the latter, in some respects, furnished a more crucial test of the strength of the Imperial sentiment than any war against a European state. The attack on the British power in South Africa was not one which aimed a vital blow at the centre of the Empire, such as would have immediately affected the security of the colonies. It was in its essence a war of secession, aiming at the separation from the Empire of one of its component parts, a war in which an unsuccessful issue would have been fatal to the complete ideal of Imperial unity, but which would not necessarily for the immediate future have involved the other colonies in any danger. The resolute and united opposition offered by every part of the Empire the moment the true character of the struggle was understood proved in the most striking fashion that what the colonies were prepared to fight for was not merely the present protection afforded them by the international position of England, but the ideal of the integrity of the United Empire.

Attitude of colonies during summer of 1899.

The war did not, however, present itself to the colonies in this aspect from the very first. When, during the summer

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Mr. G. H. Reid, since Prime Minister of Australia, declared, with reference to certain cross currents of Australian feeling which seemed to tend against Imperial unity, that the permanent attitude of Australia towards the Empire would be largely determined by the next great war in which Britain was engaged. "If," said he, "it is a war in which we colonists believe, one which appeals to our reason and our sense of what is right, then we shall see an uprising of national feeling in Australia which will simply sweep away all those minor obstacles and currents of thought which now appear to interfere with the conception of a united Empire." And in very similar language Lord Rosebery expressed himself to the same interlocutor a year or two later: "I sometimes think that nothing except a great war—one in which the security of the Empire is at stake—will ever fully open the eyes of our British people, either here or in the colonies, to what we mean when we preach the necessity for a more closely united Empire."

of 1899, the legislatures of the different colonies expressed in the very strongest terms their sympathy with the policy of Mr. Chamberlain and the Imperial Government, they were influenced by a variety of motives. The simple justice of the Uitlanders' claim to citizenship was more directly obvious to colonists accustomed to regard the liberal principles of British policy as the only normal and reasonable ones, than to Englishmen who, from their closer intercourse with Europe, are more ready to make allowances for forms of government in which exclusiveness and racial or religious intolerance predominate. Nor, again, was there any large section in the colonies bound by the traditions of the party system to criticise the policy of the Government and, by hook or crook, to make out a case for the Transvaal. Again, it was known in the colonies that the Opposition in England, the Bond party in Cape Colony, and the Boers themselves were trying to enlist colonial sympathy by representing Mr. Chamberlain's South African policy as an interference with colonial self-government, on the ground that it was not supported by the party then in power at the Cape. The colonial resolutions were, therefore, to a certain extent, also expressions of confidence in Mr. Chamberlain personally and in his Imperial policy in general, and at the same time warnings to President Kruger and to the Bond leaders that colonial feeling was against them and that they would do well to take up a more reasonable attitude. Lastly, these resolutions testified to the growing interest of the great colonies in Imperial affairs and to their natural desire to make their voice heard, especially on what was essentially a colonial question uncomplicated by more specifically English interests on the continent of Europe or Asia. But with all this it cannot be said that there was any intense feeling involved, or any idea that Imperial issues of the very first magnitude were at stake. The resolutions were the statement of a point of view rather than the manifestation of a profound emotion.

The first colonial contingents.

The offers of colonial contingents were made in a similar spirit. There was no idea that the Boers would prove a formidable adversary to the British Army. But the colonies were eager for an occasion to testify their loyalty. They

wished to give some of their officers and men the opportunity of taking part in a real campaign and of bringing back valuable lessons for the future organization of their forces. Above all, they hoped to try the mettle of their sons in action and to show England and the world that in them the quality of British blood had not suffered dilution. The spirit animating their offers was the same as that which inspired the first offers of volunteer forces in England—sheer keenness and an anxious desire to be allowed to show what they could do. But for Mr. Chamberlain, the colonial offers would probably have shared the same fate. The acceptance of the contingents, limited though it was,* created the greatest satisfaction in the colonies. When war was declared, preparations were pushed forward with alacrity, and a few days after the receipt of the news of the first British victories the several contingents sailed off amidst scenes of tremendous enthusiasm. To analyse that enthusiasm would not be easy, but of the diverse elements that entered into it the predominant one was, perhaps, not Imperial but national sentiment. It was the national self-consciousness, stirred by the sight of the chosen representatives to whom their country's credit was entrusted, that was the emotion uppermost in the minds of the cheering crowds at Quebec, Sydney or Wellington. The Imperial sentiment and the love for the mother-country, without which the contingents would never have been offered, were there too, but as the emotional setting and background, as it were, to the no less intense national feeling.† To say that

* See vol. ii., p. 116.

† Nothing can be more interesting in this connection than a study of the farewell speeches to the first Canadian contingent at Quebec. To quote but a sentence from Sir Wilfrid Laurier: "This is a unique occasion in the history of the world; it is a spectacle which ought to make every Canadian feel proud of his country." So, too, Sir F. Borden, Minister of Militia: "The people of Canada have fully realized their responsibility and the debt they owe to the Empire. Canada has thrown off the swaddling-clothes—she is a full-grown member of the family which makes the Empire." And the same idea appears even more clearly in the words of Mr. Parent, the Mayor of Quebec: "Who is there that will dare affirm that we have not all the qualities necessary for the making of a real nation? Who dare say, upon such an occasion as the present, that we are not all sincerely united and loyal towards the Canadian Dominion and loyal to England, which has given us so complete a measure of liberty? . . .

there was absolute unanimity of enthusiasm would indeed be going too far. The anti-Imperial, cosmopolitan-parochialist section in England has its analogue in the colonies as well, and in Canada and Australia, as in England, voices were raised against the wanton aggression of the Imperial Government for not leaving South Africa to its own devices, and against the brutal militarism which wished to defend British territory from invasion. But they were few—far fewer than in England, where the party system was largely enlisted in their favour—and even where they belonged to men or newspapers who in ordinary times carried weight with their public, they met with but scant attention, or were even, in some cases, forcibly silenced by popular indignation.

The Black Week in the Empire.

Scarcely had the first contingents sailed when the tidings of Nicholson's Nek reached the colonies. Gradually, as in England, a feeling of anxiety and insecurity sprang up. Then came the week of reverses, and with it a storm of emotion swept through the colonies. Quivering over the ocean cables it sped almost instantaneously from end to end of the British dominions, the tidings of disaster at each point barely outstripping the utterance of the sympathy and emotion called forth by it elsewhere. If community of sentiment is not enough to make a nation without consciousness of that community, then indeed the electric telegraph and the Press have been no small factors in revealing the British Empire as a living whole to the consciousness of the individuals that compose it. For the first time in its history the Empire was thrilled by one overmastering emotion, and the response it gave showed that the living spirit was in it. In Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, men sprang forward to be allowed to serve, exactly as they were doing at that same moment in England, and for the same cause—for the defence of that ideal whose preciousness they hardly knew till its realization was thus suddenly imperilled. The suddenness and intensity of the change wrought in a few days was as surprising to the most

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Let us be united for the great and holy cause we have in hand—the foundation of a great nation and the development of the boundless resources of a rich and immense country."

sanguine preachers of the Imperial idea as it was to the most sceptical and captious of the high priests of parochialism. The deep-seated idealism which is no less characteristic of Englishmen than the matter-of-fact and unsentimental cloak with which they in ordinary times conceal their feelings from each other, and even from themselves, came to the surface as strongly as ever in our past history. From that sudden and passionate revelation the sentiment of Imperial unity gained a depth and intensity which will manifest itself again if another hour of need should come. For the present, indeed, that sentiment has withdrawn itself again into the silent background, and the process of Imperial consolidation will be carried through, outwardly at least, on purely practical lines.

Effect of the war on Imperial sentiment

But the effect of the war will remain. The fact alone that the colonial contingents took a leading part in the war has set a precedent which will almost inevitably be followed, and followed on a larger scale, in any great Imperial war, the justice of which appeals directly to the political conscience of the colonies. The natural tendency of the younger communities on such an occasion will be to desire to repeat and to outdo their previous performances. Every veteran of South Africa will be a recruiting sergeant for the new contingents. Opposition to any proposals for taking part in Imperial wars, which has hitherto mainly relied on vague predictions about the dangers to colonial prosperity and independence involved by being "drawn into the vortex of Imperial militarism," will be weakened by the disproof of actual facts. What the war has brought the colonies has been no small military glory—a matter that no nation, least of all a young nation, is inclined to despise—and a greater voice in Imperial affairs. The knowledge on the part of Englishmen at home of what the colonies can do will inevitably lead to a greater regard for colonial interests and colonial sentiment which is destined completely to change our diplomatic, military, and economic policy, hitherto Imperial in name, but far too insular in fact. Conversely the tangible realization by colonists of the power on sea and land of the United Empire, and the bond of blood shed for a common cause, will immensely strengthen the sentiment in favour

of closer union in the colonies. To the sense of blood brotherhood has been added that of comradeship in arms.

Effect on national sentiment.

But if the sentiment of Imperialism has been strengthened in the colonies, no less has that of nationalism. The colonial soldier in the field became more conscious of his national individuality by contrast with the other troops he associated with, and he imposed a recognition of that individuality upon others. No Englishman who has been through the South African War will think of colonials indiscriminately as a class; he will think of Canadians, Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, each name bearing as clear and distinct a significance to him as the name of Scotchman or Irishman. For an Empire that is to be based on the principle of equal union, there can be no better guarantee of vitality than this sense of individual life and individual character in each member of the federation, joined to an underlying consciousness, no less strong, of essential oneness on all great issues of sentiment and policy. In this, as in every other respect, the South African War has advanced the whole question of the confederation of the Empire to an extent that was undreamt of in the summer of 1899. It has not, indeed, provided the solution of any of the great problems of Imperial defence, Imperial representation, or commercial union, but it has translated those problems from the realm of speculation to the realm of practical politics, and has made their solution a living and urgent question. It has brought the Empire to the parting of the ways, and the next few years will show whether the road that we shall follow leads to unity or to disintegration.

The attitude of Australia.

Of all the colonies, the Australian ones were the most directly interested in the South African controversy. In view of the vast and increasing commerce between Australia and the mother-country, the safety of the Cape route must always be a question of the very highest importance in the eyes of Australian statesmen. And apart from such considerations of contingent self-interest, Australians had strong personal feelings over the issue between Kruger and the Uitlanders. Australian miners formed no small section of the population of the Rand. They had taken a prominent

part in the abortive revolution of 1896. It was an Australian, "Karri" Davies, who, with one other member of the Reform Committee, had refused to weaken a just cause by asking pardon of Kruger. Australians were under no illusion as to the idyllic character of the peasant rulers of the Transvaal. As soon as the crisis became acute, public meetings were held all over the Australian colonies to express sympathy with the Uitlanders and to support the attitude of the Imperial Government. The question of sending Australian contingents to join the Imperial forces in the event of a war was discussed at an early stage. The idea of active participation in the wars of the Empire was not altogether a new one. As far back as 1867 Tasmania had sent a contingent to assist the Imperial forces in the Maori War. More recently a body of New South Wales troops took part in the Sudan campaign of 1885. A little active service and much tedious waiting at Suakim was all they saw, and, judging by surface indications alone, one might have imagined that in Australia the result had been to damp any inclination to repeat the performance. But that was far from being the case, and the partial disappointment of 1885 made Australians all the more cager at heart to try again.

Arrangements for the Australian contingents.

On July 11, 1899, the Government of Queensland communicated to Mr. Chamberlain an offer of the services of 250 mounted infantry with machine guns, noteworthy as the first offer of help made by any colony. On the 12th Lord Brassey, Governor of Victoria, telegraphed that volunteers were offering themselves for service in South Africa, and on the 21st Earl Beauchamp could announce that in the New South Wales forces alone some 1,860 officers and men had sent in their applications to serve if required. There was a general desire that the different colonies should combine to send a strong contingent which should be representative of that Australian Commonwealth which, though not yet in existence, was in all men's minds. A conference of the military commandants of the Australian colonies, including Tasmania, met at Melbourne on September 28, and formulated a scheme for the despatch of a joint contingent of all arms, 2,500 strong, more than half of which was to be mounted.

Scarcely, however, had the scheme been agreed upon when it was superseded by the receipt of the famous telegram of October 3 stating that the military authorities desired the colonial contingents to be organized in units of about 125 men, and would accept two units from the larger and one from the smaller colonies. These, on their arrival at the Cape, were to be incorporated in the Imperial army, and to be paid by the Imperial Government at ordinary rates. This overruling of the original scheme was unfortunate. But there was nothing else to be done and the commandants accordingly returned home to arrange for the organization of their respective units. New South Wales applied on October 11 for permission to send a complete field battery as one of its units. This was refused, but a further offer of a field hospital of fifty beds and half a bearer company, which subsequently did excellent service, was fortunately accepted, as were also the services of volunteers from the squadron of New South Wales Lancers who had been training at Aldershot. Tasmania considered that for her small population a contingent of eighty men would be sufficient to ensure the principle of representation which was all that the colonial contingents were then allowed to aspire to. The motion to send the various units was passed by large majorities in the different colonial parliaments, the announcement of the decision being accompanied in every case by scenes of the greatest enthusiasm and by the singing of the National Anthem.

Part played by the colonial volunteer forces.

Between October 28 and November 5 the first Australian contingents* sailed amidst the most enthusiastic popular demonstrations. They were officered and manned almost entirely by members of the various colonial volunteer forces, and thus possessed the advantage of a certain amount of initial training, which was destined to stand them in good

* A squadron N.S.W. Lancers (mostly from Aldershot), one mounted infantry and one infantry unit, and half the medical corps from New South Wales; two companies of Mounted Rifles from Queensland; one mounted and one infantry unit from Victoria; one infantry unit each from South Australia and West Australia, and eighty infantrymen from Tasmania; or about 1,200 men in all. The infantry were all eventually mounted in South Africa.

stead in the field. In the case of the Australians, as indeed of all the other colonial contingents, it should never be forgotten that their success was mainly due to the persistent efforts of those officers, whether Imperial or colonial, who during the past twenty years had given their services to the organization and development of the colonial forces. It was the existence of these forces that kept up the military spirit in the colonies; without them the suggestion of colonial contingents would no more have been mooted than the Imperial Yeomanry or City Imperial Volunteers—to which, both in the spirit which gave them birth and in the plan on which they were formed, they bore so close a resemblance—would have suggested themselves if there had been no Yeomanry and no Volunteers in Great Britain. They supplied the staff necessary to organize, equip and despatch, and the officers and non-commissioned officers to train and lead the different corps which in rapid succession were sent off to the theatre of war. No small share of the credit for the successful despatch of the colonial contingents belongs to the Imperial officers in command of the colonial forces, such as Colonel French* in New South Wales, Colonel Penton in New Zealand, and others, on whom fell the inconspicuous but most important task of supervising the raising of the successive contingents. Even the tactics used with such effect by the colonial troops in the field were not the mere spontaneous product of colonial common-sense, but were the direct outcome of the system of mounted infantry training introduced by a few Imperial officers.

The second Australian contingents

In the beginning of November, Mr. Lyne,† Premier of New South Wales, suggested to the other Australian premiers the raising of further contingents, but it was then generally thought that enough had been done to testify Australian loyalty, and that actual help was not required. But when after Magersfontein *The Times* suggested that the colonies be invited to give further assistance, and it was evident that, apart from its political significance, such assistance would be really valuable in itself, Mr. Lyne

* Now Major-General Sir G. A. French, K.C.M.G.

† Now Sir W. Lyne, K.C.M.G.

telegraphed directly to Mr. Chamberlain offering a further contingent. The offer was gladly accepted, and this time the Imperial Government announced that mounted men would be preferred. Governments and people of Australia were now alike unanimous in their eagerness to help. Many of the best men, who had held back when it was only a question of joining a representative contingent, now pressed forward to volunteer when it was a question of the safety of the Empire. Mr. Lyne and some of the other premiers wished to make this second contingent a combined one representing all Australia, but in the end the colonies sent their second contingents separately. New South Wales sent three companies of mounted infantry and a squadron of the 1st Australian Horse,* a battery of field artillery (now acceptable to the War Office), and the second half of the New South Wales Medical Corps; Victoria sent two companies of Mounted Rifles; Queensland one company; Tasmania another fifty men. Large numbers of volunteers went into camp all over Australia to be ready in case further contingents should be required.

The Australian and Imperial Bushmen.

Besides these, the idea of a combined Australian force was revived in the movement for raising a force of Australian "Bushmen," which sprang up simultaneously in Australia and among Australians or others connected with Australia in London during the last days of the year. The first suggestion for the formation of such a force seems to have come from a letter sent to *The Times* by Mr. J. H. Brodie, an Australian gentleman in London. The object of the movement was to raise a considerable force of mounted men, all accustomed to the rough and tumble life of the "back-block" districts of Australia, men who would easily find themselves at home on the South African veld, and prove a match for the Boer at his own tactics. Like the Imperial Yeomanry, the Australian Bushmen were mainly organized by the exertions of a private committee, and relied largely on private subscriptions collected in Australia and in London to defray the expenses of equipment, quartering, and transport. The men were on the whole of a

* Attached with the New South Wales Lancers to the Scots Greys.

good stamp, though a certain proportion of them were not real bushmen, but only adventurous and patriotic young men of the same class as those who joined the Imperial Yeomanry in England. The chief difficulty lay in securing efficient officers. In all, some 1,400 Bushmen left for South Africa before the middle of March, 1900. To be distinguished from these Australian Bushmen are the Imperial Bushmen, a force raised during March and April as the result of a telegram from Mr. Chamberlain to Mr. Lyne on March 1, asking for another 2,000 men of the same stamp as the Australian Bushmen, the Imperial Government to defray all the expenses of raising these, and further to pay the men at the South African rate of five shillings a day. Some 2,400 sailed by the beginning of May, and there would have been no difficulty at the time in securing four or five times that number. In all, the Australian colonies sent 6,328 officers and men to South Africa by the middle of May, 1900,* or 16,632 if we include the contingents raised in the later course of the war.

Australian share in the cost of the contingents.

Though the Imperial Government provided the pay and rations of the colonial contingents when they reached South Africa, and undertook to transport them home, and grant wound pensions and compassionate allowances at Imperial rates, the equipping, housing, and sending out of the contingents and the supplementing of Imperial rates of pay to bring them more into accordance with colonial ideas, involved the colonial governments in considerable expenses. New South Wales alone spent £400,000, and the other Australian colonies in proportion to their contingents. Besides the Government expenditure large sums were raised by private subscription for the equipment of the Australian Bushmen and other contingents, and for charitable and other funds both in the colonies and in England. In one way or another Australia contributed a net expenditure of fully £1,200,000 towards the cost of the war.

New Zealand and the crisis.

On September 28 the New Zealand House of Represen-

* Viz., 2,694 from New South Wales (6,945 total for the whole war), 1,423 (3,757) from Victoria, 864 (2,370) from Queensland, 571 (1,432) from South Australia, 475 (1,129) from West Australia, 301 (749) from Tasmania.

tatives passed, amid a scene of great enthusiasm, a resolution to offer the Imperial Government the services of two companies of Mounted Rifles, the colony not only to equip and despatch the contingent, but to provide its pay in the field.* In spite of the absence of any previous organization for the raising of such a force, and the lack of equipment and stores, Colonel Penton, the Commandant, and Mr. Douglas,† Under-Secretary for Defence, had everything ready for October 21, and the New Zealanders under Major Robin reached Naauwpoort in time to take part in all General French's operations. When the news of Colenso reached Wellington, the Legislature was not sitting, but Mr. Seddon, the Prime Minister, promptly telegraphed to the members of both Houses that the Government were of opinion that New Zealand should send a second contingent at once, and also man and horse the battery of Hotchkiss machine-guns offered by the Armstrong-Elswick Company, but wished for an expression of their views. The answers received to this question furnish one of the most striking documents in the whole history of the war.‡ With scarcely a single dissentient, the legislators of the most democratic community of modern times urge upon their Government the duty of supporting the Empire at this crisis, and of doing anything that might forward the cause of Imperial unity.

"Our duty is plain," writes more than one member. "New Zealand is bound by honour, conscience, and interest to support the Imperial Government"; "the interests of the Empire should outweigh every other consideration. We have not hitherto done our complete duty in return for the protection of the Imperial flag"; "this is a moment when every true son of the Empire should stand firm . . . send the contingent at whatever cost"; "grand opportunity showing practically our loyalty, patriotism, and desire for unity British Empire"; "it will be another link

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* This last part of the offer was waived by the Imperial Government, which was unwilling that there should be any difference between the various colonial contingents. The Colonial Government, however, made up their pay to a total of four shillings a day.

† Now Sir A. Douglas, Bart.

‡ See New Zealand Official Papers H. 61, 1900.

strengthening the chain of Imperial federation"; "the honour of the Empire is at stake, and we must be equal to the occasion"; "in the interest of the Empire and for the honour and glory of New Zealand, contingent should be sent. Wish I was a few years younger"; "if seventy is not too old, am willing to go myself in defence of my Queen"; "unnecessary to ask me. Answer to questions emphatically yes . . . if I were a younger man I would volunteer myself"; "our duty to the mother-country, the unity of the Empire, and the immense importance and unbounded benefit to New Zealand of the maintenance of British rule in South Africa, demand that a second contingent be sent, and that quickly."

These are but a few sentences from some 120 answers, all inspired by the same intense patriotism and devotion to the Imperial idea. With such a spirit in the colonies—and New Zealand does not stand alone in this respect—who can say that the federation of the British Empire into a single great community is an impossibility?

Second and subsequent New Zealand contingents.

On January 20, 1900, the second contingent, comprising two companies of rifles and the Hotchkiss gun detachment, sailed for South Africa. But there were hundreds still anxious to go, and, as the Bushman force was now being organized in Australia, New Zealand, after considering the advisability of joining in it, decided to send a third and fourth contingent, which were promptly equipped, and sailed on February 17 and March 24. A fifth, sixth, and seventh, the expense of raising which, as in the case of the Imperial Bushmen, was borne by the Imperial Government, followed during the next few months, and an eighth, ninth, and tenth in the later course of the war. In all, New Zealand sent to the field in the course of the war 6,343 volunteers, out of a total population of 772,719 (excluding the Maoris). On the same basis, Australia would have had to send 30,984, Canada 44,152, and the United Kingdom 340,284. The total expenditure of the Colonial Government on the earlier contingents was £194,189, while £113,256 was raised by private subscription in the colony. Of the services of the New Zealanders in the field it is unnecessary to speak at this point, but it would be hardly an exaggeration to say

that after they had a little experience they were by general consent regarded as on the average the best mounted troops in South Africa.

Attitude of Canada over the Uitlander controversy.

The attitude of Canada towards the Imperial issue raised in South Africa was for several reasons especially interesting. It was the remotest of all the greater colonies from the area of disturbance. It had no direct business interests involved in the Transvaal, or even any close concern for the permanent security of the sea route round the Cape. More than this, as a country which, like South Africa, had originally come under the British flag by conquest, and had long been familiar with the problems raised by the contact of progressive Anglo-Saxondom with a highly conservative nationalism, Canada was in a better position than any other colony to judge of the questions in dispute with insight and impartiality. To add to the interest of the situation, it was not the English but the French section that predominated in the Liberal party which held office at the time, and the Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, was himself one of the descendants of those who in 1759 yielded to the force of British arms. But so far from seeing in the conditions of their own country any reason for sympathising with the Boers, Canadians, accustomed to the perfect equality, and the free hospitality of the British colonial system, learned with surprise and almost incredulity of the position of impotent inferiority to which the immigrant industrial community of the Transvaal had to submit. On July 29 a series of strongly worded resolutions expressing sympathy with the Uitlanders, and confidence in the policy of the Imperial Government, was eloquently moved in the Canadian House of Commons by Sir Wilfrid Laurier. They were seconded, in the absence of Sir C. Tupper, by the Hon. G. E. Foster, temporarily acting as leader of the Opposition, and passed without a division.

Hesitation of the Canadian Government to send a contingent.

But Canada was not content to support the Imperial policy by moral pressure alone. Already before this, on July 13, Lieutenant-Colonel Sam Hughes, M.P., for many years past a persistent advocate of colonial participation in Imperial responsibilities, drew the attention of the House of

Commons to the offer of a contingent made by Queensland, and pressed upon the Government to take action. The matter was not taken up in Parliament, but in the country the movement in favour of sending a contingent grew rapidly during the next few weeks. Besides Colonel Hughes, a number of officers of the Canadian forces offered the services of their battalions or companies to the Imperial Government through General Hutton, the officer commanding the Canadian Militia—offers amounting in all to nearly 5,000 men. Sir W. Laurier and his colleagues meanwhile adopted an attitude of reserve. The session was over, and they were disinclined to take upon themselves the responsibility of taking so important a step as the offering of a contingent, a step involving considerable expense, and opening out wide issues of policy. Some of them, headed, it was generally supposed, by Mr. Tarte, Minister of Public Works, were opposed to Canada's participating in an Imperial war in which she had no direct interest whatever. If war had been certain, or believed to be serious, these considerations would probably not have weighed much with the Government. As it was, ministers preferred not to commit themselves, and to await events. With the majority of the Canadian public, full of eagerness to show their patriotism to the Empire, and unwilling to be outdone by younger and smaller colonies, this attitude was far from popular. By the beginning of October the agitation against the inactivity of the Ministry reached such a pitch as seriously to threaten its position, and to create the danger of grave misunderstanding between the English majority and the French element who, though perfectly loyal, had not thrown themselves into the movement with the same fervour. To remove one possible ground for hesitation on the part of the executive, Sir C. Tupper now telegraphed to Sir W. Laurier assuring him of the unqualified and loyal support of the Opposition if a contingent were sent. A few days later the Montreal *Star* published telegrams from the mayors of three hundred leading cities and townships urging the Government to send troops to South Africa immediately. Letters were also published from thirty commanding officers of Militia battalions offering men. It

was fast becoming evident that popular sentiment* would no longer brook any hesitation, whatever its motives.

The final decision.

Other events, too, were now making a decision necessary. On October 3 Mr. Chamberlain had sent to Lord Minto a telegram identical with the one sent to the Australian colonies, giving the outlines of the organization of colonial contingents considered convenient by the War Office, and suggesting that Canada would be fairly represented by four units. The only important difference was that, in the absence of Government action, the message was for the information of those who had offered to raise volunteers, but as the message had to be transmitted through the Ministry it practically compelled the latter to come to a decision as to their attitude. Only a few hours before, Sir W. Laurier had informed an interviewer that he did not see how his Government could very well, without parliamentary sanction, send a contingent to a war in which no Canadian interests were directly involved. This utterance only provoked still further agitation, heightened by the news of the ultimatum on October 9, and when Sir W. Laurier returned to Ottawa on October 12 from a visit to Chicago he found the situation so serious as to require an immediate conference of the Cabinet. In view of the unmistakable expression of public opinion, ministers waived their constitutional scruples. On the 13th an Order in Council was passed, announcing that the Militia Department was prepared to equip and transport to South Africa a thousand volunteers. This doubling of the suggestion made to them was at once communicated to Mr. Chamberlain, and was followed a few days later by a request that the eight units sent should be kept together in the field as a single battalion, which was complied with. With this decision ended a political interlude of the greatest interest to all students of the develop-

* What that sentiment was may be gathered from the reply of the St. John's City Council to a statement of the Mayor that he saw no reason for sending a contingent, a reply declaring that such a step was essential "not only for the purpose of giving assistance but of showing the mother-country and the world that Great Britain and Canada now are, and for the future will be, one and indivisible, whether the threatened danger be to a part or the whole of the Empire."

ment of Imperialism.* The delay taken by the Canadian Government in coming to a decision must not be regarded as due to a less degree of loyalty to the Empire than prevailed in the other colonies, but in part to a greater degree of caution in establishing a precedent, and still more to the fact that, owing to Canada's position in the northern hemisphere, her parliament had adjourned before the crisis became acute, while those of the southern colonies were in session.

The Canadian contingents.

Once having come to a decision, the Government threw itself into the work of enrolling the battalion with vigour. The command of the contingent was assigned to Lieutenant-Colonel W. D. Otter, commanding the infantry of the permanent force. To make the contingent thoroughly representative of all Canada, it was decided to recruit the companies at all the chief centres of the Dominion, a matter of no small delay when dealing with so vast an area.† General Hutton was away on a tour of inspection in the West, but Colonel Hubert Foster, his Chief of Staff, and the members of the Canadian Militia Department from its political chief, the Hon. F. W. Borden, downwards took matters in hand at once with such zeal and expedition that the battalion was able to embark at Quebec on October 30, reaching Cape Town on November 29. Its departure was accompanied by scenes of extraordinary national enthusiasm. Three days later, on the receipt of the news of Nicholson's Nek, Sir W. Laurier offered the Imperial Government the services of a second contingent. This offer was provisionally

* A very interesting and judicious account of these events is given in Mr. W. Sanford Evans's excellent work called 'The Canadian Contingents.'

† Mr. Sanford Evans puts the problem interestingly in terms of old-world geography. "Suppose a government with headquarters at Berlin should undertake to raise an entirely new regiment, and should choose as its recruiting points Dublin, Edinburgh, London, Lyons, Paris, Cologne, Hamburg, Berlin, Dresden, Constantinople, Bagdad, and one other point still nearer the Persian Gulf; suppose this government had never attempted anything of just the same kind before; suppose it had little in its stores except rifles and ammunition, and suppose it got this regiment of more than 1,000 men together, fully clothed and equipped and on ship-board, sailing out of the harbour of Hamburg, all within seventeen days of the time it first made up its mind to raise a regiment at all—well, it would congratulate itself."

declined, but on December 16 Mr. Chamberlain telegraphed, gladly accepting, and asking for mounted men if possible. The Canadian Government at once offered a four-squadron regiment of mounted rifles and three batteries of field artillery. For the four-squadron regiment were subsequently substituted two mounted rifle battalions of two squadrons (or about 380 rank and file). The first of these was recruited from the permanent cavalry, whose name, the Royal Canadian Dragoons, it ultimately adopted, and from cavalry regiments of the active Militia; the second, known as the Canadian Mounted Rifles, was largely composed of officers and men of that splendid force, the North-West Mounted Police, made up to strength by ex-policemen and others who could pass the requisite riding and shooting tests. They were commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Lessard, commanding the permanent cavalry, and Commissioner Herchmer of the Police. The brigade division of artillery was commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel Drury, of the permanent artillery, and made up from that force and from trained Militia artillerists. A small postal detachment, which had been offered and refused in October, also accompanied the second contingent. Something like 5,000 applied for the 1,300 places in the force, and the quality of the men selected was very high. As in the other colonies, many of the best men who had not considered it worth while to join a mainly representative corps came forward now when they believed that the unity of the Empire was in real danger. Rather longer time was allowed for the organization of the force, and the last detachments did not leave till February 21. Another important step was taken by the Canadian Government in the beginning of February to help the Imperial forces, and that was to offer to raise another special service battalion of infantry to garrison Halifax, and thus set free the Leinster Regiment for South Africa, an offer gratefully accepted.

Strathcona's Horse. Cost of the contingents.

There was one other corps raised in Canada at this time —through Government agency but at private expense—that calls for special notice. On January 11 Lord Strathcona, the Canadian High Commissioner in England and Governor of the Hudson's Bay Company, offered to raise, equip, and

transport to South Africa at his own cost a regiment of 500 (eventually nearly 600) roughriders from Manitoba, British Columbia, and the North-West. This splendid offer met with an enthusiastic response from the hardy pioneer population of the North-West, and no difficulty would have been found in raising several corps of the magnificent material that volunteered for service. Admirably equipped in every respect, Strathcona's Horse sailed from Halifax on March 16 under the command of Lieutenant-Colonel Steele of the North-West Mounted Police. The total cost of the force to Lord Strathcona exceeded £200,000. In all, Canada raised for the South African War, between October, 1899, and March, 1900, 3,000 men, or 4,000, if the provisional battalion sent to Halifax is included,* at a total cost of £570,000, or nearly one and a half times the ordinary annual military budget of the colony. Reckoning in the large sums raised by private subscription to help the equipping of the men or provide them with luxuries, the colony, in one way or another, probably contributed very nearly a million pounds to the burden of the war.

South Africa and Newfoundland.

The part played by the South African colonies will be more appropriately discussed in the chapters dealing with the direct local effects of the British defeats. Here we need only mention, as a significant indication of the strength of the wider Imperial sentiment in South Africa, the tremendous enthusiasm of the reception accorded at Cape Town and elsewhere to the first colonial contingents, and after them to the City Imperial Volunteers and the first detachments of Yeomanry. The only one of the self-governing colonies which did not send a contingent was Newfoundland. The reason of this abstention lay, not in lack of patriotic sympathy, but simply in the absence of any pre-existing military organization, the colonial volunteer force having dwindled out of existence some twenty years before. The only form in which the patriotism of the colony showed itself was in the prolonging throughout the war of the *modus vivendi* with

* Including later contingents and recruits for the South African Constabulary, the total number of Canadians who went to South Africa for the war amounted to 8,372.

France as regards the Treaty Shore, which would otherwise have come to an end with the year 1899, and thus have forced an extremely difficult and delicate question upon the Foreign Office at a critical time.

The Crown colonies.

The loyalty called forth by the war was not confined to the self-governing colonies or to the members of the English race, and, had it not been for the peculiar circumstances of the South African conflict, which made the use of coloured troops undesirable, would no doubt have been displayed in the most effective fashion, by the despatch of contingents. As early as July 17, 1899, the Government of the Federated Malay States offered the services of 300 of the Malay States Guides in case of war. On the 18th the Legislative Council of Lagos unanimously offered the services of 300 Hausas. In November the colony of Trinidad offered a corps of 15 officers and 120 men. The Indian tribes of Canada and the Maoris of New Zealand wished to send volunteers to take part in England's war. But in none of these cases could the Imperial Government see its way to accepting the offers made. Early in January, 1900, however, the Legislative Council of Ceylon unanimously agreed to send a contingent of 125 mounted infantry, raised among the white planters of the colony. This offer was gladly accepted, and the Ceylon contingent embarked on February 1 and reached South Africa in time to join Lord Roberts immediately after his arrival at Bloemfontein. The loyalty of those who offered their services and were refused was in no way damped, and they found an outlet for it in the collection of subscriptions for the various patriotic funds. Thus, for instance, the *Straits Times'* fund raised $72,000 in a few weeks, of which sum $10,000 was given by a single wealthy Chinese merchant of Singapore.

India and the war.

A British war in which the Indian Army, European and native, plays no part is almost like the play of *Hamlet* with the Prince of Denmark left out. Yet, for reasons already given, the part played by the Indian Army in the South African operations was confined to the small force which saved Natal, supplemented in January by the 16th Lancers, the 3rd battalion of Mounted Infantry from Burma, and "J" Battery, R.H.A.; and to a great deal of invaluable assistance to the

remount and ordnance departments.* When the period of reverses came, offers of voluntary aid poured in alike from the native princes and from the wild tribesmen of the North-West Frontier. The only offer which could be accepted was one of a corps of 250 mounted infantry which Colonel Lumsden of the Assam Valley Light Horse undertook to raise among the white volunteer corps of India. The raising of this corps, which sailed at the end of February, evoked no less enthusiasm throughout India than the raising of corresponding contingents had done in the colonies. Although only Englishmen actually composed the contingent, it was equally representative of the loyalty of the princes and people of India, who took the very keenest interest in it, and subscribed with the greatest generosity towards the costs of raising and the equipment. This patriotic generosity was also displayed in various other ways; in gifts of remounts, of hospital *tongas* (light ambulance carts), and in subscriptions to the various funds. A striking instance of the brotherly feeling between the native Indian Army and its white comrades was shown by the 3rd Bengal Cavalry, a regiment composed of Sikhs, Rajputs, Jats and Moslems, which subscribed a day's pay towards the Transvaal War Fund. In India itself, and even over the border, prayers for the success of the British arms were regularly said during the period of crisis, alike in Moslem mosques and Hindu temples.

British communities abroad.

Equally keen was the interest taken by the various British communities in foreign countries, in Europe, China, South America. Subscriptions were freely collected. Though their numbers and position made the sending of actual contingents out of the question, not a few took the first steamer after the news of Colenso, resolved to join the Yeomanry at home or to enlist in the various corps which were being recruited in South Africa. These last, indeed, contained a very considerable proportion of Britons from every end of

* In all India sent 7,794 white troops and 6,761 horses to South Africa in the first year of the war. Besides these there was an Indian transport corps, a corps of water-carriers, a corps of syces, or grooms, and a corps of washermen, and of these miscellaneous non-combatants India supplied over 7,000 in the course of the war.

the world, and of Canadians or Australians who had been unable to get into their colonies' contingents.

Total output of colonial patriotism.

In all the voluntary patriotism of the Empire outside the United Kingdom and South Africa contributed over 11,000 men to the South African Field Force during the most critical months, and nearly 30,000 in the whole course of the war. This may not seem a great feat for a population of nearly eleven millions on so high a level of prosperity as that of the British colonies. But, as in the case of England itself, it was lack of preparation and organization, and not lack of patriotic zeal, that prevented the total result being greater. No one who witnessed the depth and intensity of the national emotion in any part of the Empire can doubt that patriotism and belief in the justice of their cause was at least as strong among Britons as among Boers. But the difference becomes immense when the effective output of national energy on the two sides is compared. If there is one lesson that the South African War should have taught the British nation, in England and in the colonies, it is the danger and costliness of the policy of "muddling through," and the feebleness of "spontaneous individual enterprise," and that not in war alone, but in every department of the national life.

Value and significance of colonial aid.

Small as was the force contributed by the Empire compared to what may yet be done in a still greater emergency and with proper organization beforehand, it was none the less a material assistance, whose value can hardly be overrated. It practically doubled the mounted force, and thus made possible those great sweeping movements by which Lord Roberts reached Pretoria. Above all, it gave the Imperial Government a moral support which enabled it to face with equanimity the almost universal hostility of the European Powers, or the fanatical outcries of a few extreme anti-Imperialist partisans at home. Never, probably, in modern times has there been a greater consensus of honest opinion in support of a great national movement than that which backed up Britain's effort to maintain her position in South Africa. Neither in the great War of Secession nor in the more recent Spanish War was American opinion so

united and so resolute. The moral forces which helped to create united Italy or united Germany were not stronger than that aspiration making for British unity which displayed itself in so striking a fashion in the crisis of the war. It was a wholly spontaneous movement. There was no question of the Imperial Government exercising pressure or even persuasion upon the self-governing communities to make return for the protection they had enjoyed. It was not even the case that the colonial governments decided that it was their duty to help, and ordered the despatch of such forces as they thought fit. It was simply that the free citizens of free countries asked to be allowed to venture their lives for the sake of a political ideal which was personally and intimately dear to each one of them, and that, in spite of the paralysing absence of either precedent or preparation, many thousands actually achieved their desire. Regarded not from the point of view of efficiency, but simply as an index of national sentiment, it was a wonderful result. And it is on sentiment that all political organization ultimately rests, and of sentiment that it is composed. The war has not shown what the Empire can do, but it has revealed to those who perhaps doubted before what an Empire we can make if we but choose. It has tested our material and our foundations; the task now before us is to build.

CHAPTER III

THE NATIONS AND ENGLAND

The emotion excited by the British reverses.

THE wave of disturbance started by the repulse of the British arms in South Africa was not confined to the circle of the British dominions. Behind the trifling losses and the indecisive conclusion of the battles by the Modder River and the Tugela, foreigners as well as Englishmen saw with a sudden intuition the great issues involved. Without the circle of the British Empire, as within it, the tidings of the Boer victories sent a thrill of emotion, as unique historically, and politically as significant, as any that has shaken the civilized world in the last generation. The meaning of that emotion, the elements that combined to give it its strength or its peculiar character in different countries, are well worthy of careful analysis. For just as the emotion that swept through the British Empire revealed in a sudden flash the transformation that for years past had been maturing in its internal structure, so, too, the emotional effect of the South African crisis upon the world outside brought out in striking contrast the dangerous and unsatisfactory international situation into which that Empire had gradually drifted.

Natural sympathy for the Boers.

But before dwelling on the international significance of the emotion evoked in different countries by the events of the South African War, it is necessary first of all to discriminate between those elements of feeling which were the mere natural consequences of the particular character of the war and those which the war did not create but only revealed. We must not forget, in the first place, that the ordinary foreign spectator knew nothing of the long chain of circum-

LIEUT.-GENERAL THE HON. SIR N. G. LYTTELTON, K.C.B.,
COMMANDING 4TH BRIGADE, OCT., 1899.
COMMANDING 2ND DIVISION, FEB., 1900.
COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF S. AFRICA JUNE, 1902.

Photo by Gregory & Co.

stances that had almost inevitably led up to the war—the misgovernment of the Transvaal, the conflict between the incompatible ideals of aggressive Afrikanderdom and British Imperialism, of racial exclusiveness and democratic freedom. The British Government had made no attempt to get its case fairly put before the foreign public. The Boers, on the other hand, had spared neither trouble nor money in their endeavours to influence the European and American Press. Their arguments were effectively seconded by the tirades of pro-Boer writers and speakers in England, to whose conventional violence was assigned a meaning and an importance which a better knowledge of the ways of English party politics might have discounted. With such inadequate and partial evidence before them, we can hardly be surprised if even unprejudiced foreigners were inclined to believe that the British Government was carrying on an unjust war of aggression. Add to this the instinctive thrill of sympathy stirred by the spectacle of a handful of peasants contending successfully against the paid troops of a mighty empire, and we can see that foreign sympathy or even enthusiasm for the Boer cause was but the natural consequence of the circumstances of the case, and of the stupid or unpatriotic indifference to the importance of public opinion abroad shown by the Government or by its critics.

Mere sympathy insufficient to explain intensity of European feeling.

Yet none of the reasons just given furnish an adequate explanation for the outburst of delirious excitement, for the unloosing of the flood of calumny and vituperation directed against England, which, over a great part of the European continent, accompanied the tidings of Boer success. The obscene and vile caricatures and libels upon our soldiers, our statesmen, and even our Queen; the hysterical speeches, letters and poems, in which not merely the hack-writers of the Press, but men of eminence in the world of science and literature, gave vent to their overwrought feelings; the insatiable public demand for news of more and yet more British reverses—it would be idle to add up how often in these months the fall of Ladysmith or the annihilation of Sir R. Buller's army was published in the continental press—all this furious hatred and exultation sprang from sources

deeper than a mere moral judgment on the merits of the South African controversy. The Powers whom no fleeting considerations of humanity could move to interfere in the Armenian massacres, who were busy with the suppression of liberty or nationality in Finland, Posen or Schleswig, were not likely to be so terribly perturbed by the trifling casualties on the battlefields of South Africa or by the prospective conversion of the Boer republics into self-governing British colonies. Nothing short of a widespread and deeply-rooted hatred of England, due not to momentary causes, but to a standing conflict of interests and principles, can account for a state of feeling in a great part of Europe which, but for the prudence and mutual distrust of governments, might have called to arms a great league of peoples confederate against the very existence of the British Empire.

The clerical reaction against English Liberalism.

There is no reason to seek an explanation for this general ill-will in remote historical quarrels or in fanciful theories of some common purpose running through all the dealings of England with the continental states. The causes of it were natural and obvious, and its growth was a matter of the last generation and more especially of the last decade. In that growth of hostility to England, two main factors stand out conspicuously. The first in point of time, though perhaps the less important, was the general European reaction against English Liberalism. The Liberal party in Europe, which for nearly a generation after 1848 seemed to be winning its way towards complete ascendancy, looked to contemporary England not only for constitutional models and for inspiration, but also for sympathy and even for diplomatic support. In the internal politics of the European States, England was, in fact, as well as in the general opinion, a partisan Power. Accordingly, the elements that overthrew Liberalism on the continent were avowedly hostile not only to English principles, but also to England herself. Of these elements, the strongest and bitterest was the clerical reaction. The movement which found its most significant demonstration in the Vatican Council, which brought Bismarck to his Canossa over the *Kulturkampf*, which, from the sorry fiasco of the *Boulange* down to the hysteric frenzies of the Dreyfus con-

troversy,* convulsed France, which, working on kindred though not identical lines in Russia, expressed itself in M. Pobyedonostzeff's persecution of Lutherans, Stundists and Jews, was everywhere accompanied by manifestations of hatred against the motherland of Liberalism.

The intellectual reaction.

But besides the obscurantist reaction there was also the positive intellectual reaction in the political world which will always be associated with the great name of Bismarck. With all its merits, nineteenth-century English Liberalism was a creed marred by many fundamental weaknesses of theory and practical absurdities. Even in its own home it played its great part only because it fitted in with a special phase in the constitutional development of the nation, and because the peculiar position of England outside the world-struggle, political and economic, concealed its worst deficiencies. Applied to other circumstances by doctrinaire imitators, its one-sidedness and its impracticability stood too nakedly revealed. There may be features in Prussian *Realpolitik* that it is difficult to sympathize with, yet we must not forget that the political union and the industrial prosperity of Germany were won by Bismarck in the teeth of desperate opposition on the part of German Liberalism, an opposition directly supported, as he believed, by English influences. And not only the politicians of Bismarck's school, but the leaders of historical and political thought in the great German universities inspired their countrymen with aversion and contempt for England. England in their eyes personified self-sufficiency, phrasemongering, false sentimentalism, as contrasted with their own ideal of patient study, directness of purpose, and fearlessness in choice of means. Little wonder that, with these views, Germans resented what seemed to them the unmerited position of England in the world, and thirsted for an opportunity to see her displaced by a worthier successor.

The economic and territorial struggle.

But even stronger than intellectual or constitutional

* Readers of the French clerical press of that period will recollect the wearisome iteration of the legend of the *Syndicat Anglo-Juif*, and similar attempts to bring odium on the Dreyfusards by connecting them with England.

antipathy was the influence of the great economic and territorial struggle that had been waged between England on the one side and the leading European states on the other for over twenty years with ever-growing intensity. The close of the Napoleonic wars left England supreme in industry and commerce, and the predominant Power over the whole world outside of the European continent. The peaceful transference of Cape Colony from its original possessors, with which event this history opens, was but one among many other overt recognitions of this predominance. For sixty years England's position remained unchallenged and, because unchallenged, unguarded. But from about 1880 onwards the European Powers, which, after a long period of external conflicts and internal revolutions, had at last reached a condition of more stable equilibrium, once again began to enter the field as the industrial and territorial competitors of England. Pursuing the constructive policy by which England had made herself great in the past, they set to work stimulating industrial progress in their own territories and, as an essential complement to that progress, adding to their dominion fresh territories, which should provide in time both an expanding market and a secure source of supply of raw materials within their own control.

British resistance to European expansion.

It was uphill work building up industries against the overwhelming monopoly of priority enjoyed by English manufacturers. It was not a task calculated to foster goodwill for England among her competitors, but rather that elemental feeling which the German language so tersely conveys in the word *Brodneid*, jealousy of another for earning the bread that might be yours; while in those who already foresaw the final success of their policy of national effort and sacrifice, dislike of England was intensified by the contempt felt by the toiling aspirant for the unmerited prosperity of those whom he hopes soon to see humbled and displaced. But it was in their attempts to extend their territories outside of Europe and to found colonial empires, that the European Powers were brought most directly into conflict with England. All the best portions of the world's

surface, especially the temperate regions, where a European population could create a new home and add new strength to a mother-country, were already occupied by England or closed to occupation by the republican jealousy of the United States. Against the British fleet, the conquest of any of these territories was out of the question, and reluctantly Germany and France set to work from about 1880 onwards to carve out spheres for themselves in those parts of Asia and Africa that still remained unoccupied. But though England had not hitherto taken the trouble to occupy or administer any of these regions, there were few of them in which English trade was not interested—more interested, very often, owing to the chance developments of *laisser-faire* industrial policy, than in regions of greater possibilities already under the British flag. To allow these regions to be transferred from the steadily shrinking open market to the ever-growing area of protection was obviously contrary to British interests. Consequently every attempt at territorial expansion by the European Powers met with British opposition. In some cases this opposition took the form of the assertion of a sort of "Monroe doctrine" on behalf of the open market—a theory naturally resented by Powers whose whole object was to increase the area of their national industrial unit; in others of hurried counter-annexations.

The era of Anglo-European crises.

Against this "dog-in-the-manger" policy, as it must often have seemed to them, none of the Powers, except Russia, could have done anything if England had really meant business in her opposition. But it was very soon discovered that, at any rate up to a certain point, England did not mean business. Certain annexations could be carried out in spite of occasional British growls. But there always came a stage, generally just when some particularly rich valley or some vital link in a chain of possessions was in question, when the ground became dangerous. Then would follow a crisis in which some European Power, conscious of its inferiority at sea, had to try the nerve-straining experiment of seeing how far it could trespass upon English irresolution and dislike of war. During the last decade especially, these Anglo-European crises had been almost

continuous, and their effect upon the nerves of Europe one of steadily accumulating intensity. The last eighteen months which preceded the outbreak of the South African War had seen relations strained almost to breaking-point in every direction. Fashoda had filled France with the keen resentment that follows upon public humiliation. Samoa had just brought back to Germany that sense of baffled impotence which she had already felt after the Emperor's telegram to Kruger in 1896. And although Russia had succeeded in snatching Port Arthur from under the very guns of British battleships, yet the danger of war and all it meant to the ill-knit fabric of the Russian Empire had been very near. What wonder then that hatred of England smouldered more and more fiercely on the Continent and only waited for an occasion to burst into open flame? In the mind of the general public, at least, it had almost entirely displaced the older quarrels of the Powers with each other—quarrels that for many years had been allowed to rest—and the desirability of a general coalition to put an end to England's maritime supremacy was freely discussed in pamphlets and magazine articles while the war-cloud in South Africa was still no bigger than a man's hand.

The South African defeats taken as a sign of imminent dissolution.

But if the European hatred of England was the hatred of impotence, it was also the hatred of contempt. That England was fundamentally feeble and unpatriotic, that her Empire was on the verge of dissolution, had become the general belief of men who were unable to realize that the England which had been swayed by Cobden and Gladstone was still, at the core, the England of Chatham and Pitt. It was only England's money, they thought, which enabled her to pay fo the fleet which kept the more virile nations from settling their long-standing accounts with her, as they assuredly would in time when the development of their industrial policy furnished them with the material basis for outbidding England at sea. But waiting was slow, and they looked impatiently for a sign. And now the sign had come. A handful of armed peasants had revealed the military weakness and incompetence of the braggart Power which they themselves could not reach to strike. England was on her

knees, and would, no doubt, as she had done before, accept any terms dictated to her sooner than submit to the sacrifices demanded by a continuance of the war. It was the beginning of the destined end. The brave Boers had done what they, the Great Powers, had been unable to do, but it was not to the Boers but to themselves that the fruits of the victory would fall. That was the real keynote of the great thrill of exultation and excitement that ran through Europe during those December days, that was the motive that breathed through obscene cartoons and hysterical leading articles, that was the hope that for the next few months directed a constant stream of adventurous spirits to South Africa to take the field, not for the Boers, but against the recognized enemy of their country.

Friendly attitude of other European nations and monarchs.

It would, however, be a mistake to assume that this violent hatred for England was universal in Europe. In its fullest intensity it was confined—as the analysis of its historical origin would suggest—to France, Germany, and Russia, the countries whose national aspirations for expansion had brought them into most frequent collision with England; and of these Germany, whose industrial rivalry was keenest and whose special hankerings after a protectorate of the "Low-German" Boer republics would be directly thwarted by British success, was perhaps the bitterest.* In other European countries Anglophobia flourished only in so far as they stood under the intellectual or journalistic influence of the Powers already named, as, for instance, Austria, Belgium, or Switzerland, or in so far as they were dominated by clericalism, as in the case of Spain † and Portugal. In many countries, which were unaffected by the causes of discord analysed above, there was on the contrary a readiness to

* In a brief sketch like the present it is only possible to deal with the general movement of feeling. In every country there were, no doubt, individuals whose sympathies were on the British side and who were ready to risk popular obloquy by a courageous avowal of those sympathies. We need only mention the names of such writers as M. Yves Guyot in France, MM. Tallichet, Villarais and Naville in Switzerland, or Senhor Navarro in Portugal.

† Spain was also affected more directly by English sympathy for the United States in 1898, which had practically prevented Europe intervening to save the Spanish colonies.

treat the question dispassionately, or even, in countries which England had befriended in the past, a sympathy no less genuine and spontaneous, and no less worth recording than the animosity of her rivals. In Italy the public, from King Humbert downwards, with the exception of the extreme clerical and socialist sections, was generally friendly. The Italian Foreign Minister, Marquis Visconti Venosta, only expressed the general feeling of his countrymen when he gave emphatic prominence in a speech, delivered soon after the British reverses, to the traditional feelings of friendship between Italy and England. General Ricciotti Garibaldi even offered his own services and those of a contingent of Italian volunteers to show the strength of Italian gratitude for the part England had played in furthering the cause of Italian unity. In Austria, German and clerical influences kept up hostile feeling against England among the general public, though the aristocracy and the official classes generally could not but be influenced by the attitude of their venerable sovereign, the Emperor Francis Joseph, England's best friend in Europe, who lost no opportunity of openly avowing his sympathies with the British arms both to his own subjects and to the diplomatic representatives of other Powers at his Court. Hungary, on the other hand, the only country in Europe which can boast a free constitution native to the soil, remembered the sympathy extended by England in 1848 to the Hungarian struggle for constitutional liberty, and, in spite of the dependence of her Press on German channels of information, freely expressed her regret at the news of the English reverses. For the same historical reasons, the chivalrous but unfortunate Polish nation found its sympathies ranged on the side of England, and its feelings were fittingly expressed by a solemn memorial service celebrated in Krakau in the early days of February in honour of the British dead. The free and progressive Scandinavian peoples, if not actively on the British side, readily acknowledged that their Anglo-Saxon kindred were fighting in defence of legitimate political interests, and refused to give unlimited credence to the stories of British cowardice or British brutality which reached them through the continental Press. Here, too, the influence

of royalty, of King Oscar of Sweden and Norway, and of King Christian of Denmark, was thrown into the scale in favour of goodwill towards England. In Portugal, again, King Carlos and all the more responsible politicians maintained an attitude of consistent friendliness becoming the old alliance between the two nations, even at the risk of serious unpopularity. In Servia, Bulgaria, and Montenegro, sympathies were generally on the English side, and the raising of volunteers was even discussed, a recognition of the disinterested friendship England had shown to these struggling little States, and one of the items to be reckoned on the credit side of Mr. Gladstone's foreign policy.

Sympathy of the Greeks.

But nowhere did sympathy with England find more universal and intense expression than in the little kingdom of Hellas and among the Greek communities scattered over the Levant. In a debate in the Greek Chamber on January 1, 1900, M. Theotokis, the Premier, referred to what England had done to establish Greek independence in the past, and the help she had given Greece in her recent troubles, and declared that the feeling of gratitude towards England would live in the hearts of Greeks as long as Greece existed. M. Delyannis, leader of the Opposition, said that not only the kingdom of Greece, but the whole Hellenic race, were bound to honour and cherish England as the protectress of liberty, and the debate ended amid loud cheers for England. At Zante and at Larissa memorial services were held, and at the latter place a cenotaph was erected with the inscription, "Thessaly in gratitude to the champions of civilization." On the receipt of the news of Colenso, the students of the Athenian University joined in sending a message of condolence to Oxford. The recently liberated Cretans offered to raise a contingent of a thousand men. The Greek community in Egypt subscribed liberally to the Mansion House and other charitable funds. In the friendship of the smaller nations, especially of those who stand, as the Greeks do in the East, for civilization and political progress, England has an asset that a Foreign Secretary of sympathetic imagination and insight might yet turn to great account.

None of the smaller European Powers is more nearly

Peculiar position of Holland.

related to England by kinship of race, of social and of political interests, or more closely bound to England by the necessities of its international position, than the kingdom of the Netherlands. Unfortunately, the circumstances of this war were such that it would have been impossible to expect from the Dutch any other attitude than one of strong partizanship for the Boers and hostility to England. Not only were all their natural sympathies enlisted on the side of a people which, however different in character and social and political development from themselves, was nevertheless descended from the same ancestors, but their own immediate interests were also intimately concerned. President Kruger's policy of importing Hollanders to act as a counterpoise to the spread of English influences had created an opening, especially for professional men, better than any that Holland could provide in her own colonies. The reversal of Kruger's policy, whether by the admission of the Uitlanders to the franchise or by the incorporation of the Transvaal in the British Empire, meant a direct personal loss to thousands of families in Holland. Not unnaturally, then, the whole Dutch nation, from the impetuous young Queen downwards, followed the course of the war with intense emotion. But though feeling in Holland ran fully as high as in any other country in Europe, it differed from the feeling elsewhere in this, that the war was its direct and natural cause, and not a mere pretext for letting loose a flood of long-accumulated hatred.

Feeling in the United States.

Nowhere, perhaps, did the momentous issues of the South African War provoke less real excitement than in the United States. There was no doubt an actual majority who still entertained the traditional vague animosity against England, or who sympathised mildly with the Boers on the ground that they were republicans, and that their efforts to shake off the British supremacy bore a certain analogy to the American struggle for independence. This aspect of the war was urged in repeated manifestos and appeals by Kruger * and by various Boer agents, but without producing much effect. Americans in South Africa,

* Published in *New York Journal*, December 24, 1899.

who were almost unanimously on the British side, had written sufficient private letters or articles in the Press to enable the American public to grasp the fact that the word "republic" in the Transvaal connoted something very different from what it connoted elsewhere. Really strong feeling against England only existed in two sections of the public—the Irish and the extreme anti-Imperialists; and to do the latter justice it must be admitted that their denunciation of England was mainly based on the tirades of British pro-Boers, and, in any case, fell considerably short in vehemence of their denunciation of their own country's policy in Cuba and the Philippines. On the other hand, there was a very strong party, especially among the most educated and influential sections of the community, who were entirely on the British side. All those who had followed the course of international politics in recent years knew how valuable the friendly attitude of the British Government had been to them during the critical period of the Spanish War. And generally the entry of the United States into the arena of world policy and the inception of an Imperialist policy predisposed the governing party, the Republicans, to look with more understanding, and consequently more sympathy, upon the aims and methods of British policy.

American action.

If actions are any test, then certainly American effective sympathy may fairly be described as having been with England. Not only did President McKinley firmly decline to lend himself to the suggestions for intervention made by irresponsible senators and still more irresponsible journals, but the attitude of the whole administration was one of decided friendliness. This was especially apparent in the foreign and diplomatic service of the United States, at the head of which stood a remarkably able and broad-minded statesman, Mr. Hay. The friendship of the United States' representatives at the European capitals, often expressed with most undiplomatic bluntness, contributed most usefully to dispel the idea of the possibility of a general intervention of all the great Powers. It was to the American consulate at Pretoria that British interests were entrusted when the

war broke out, and when Mr. Macrum, whose sympathies were not in harmony with those of his Government or of Americans in South Africa, resigned a few weeks later, he was succeeded by the Secretary of State's own son, Mr. Adalbert Hay, a young man of great promise, unfortunately destined never to be fulfilled,* whose exertions on behalf of British subjects in the Transvaal, and more especially of British prisoners, are deserving of lasting recognition. Many Americans offered their military services, and though none were taken in America, the various local forces in South Africa contained many hundred American citizens, including not only cowboys and others who came over with cargoes of remounts and enlisted for the mere pleasure of fighting, but many members of the American community on the Rand, who volunteered in order to bear witness to their countrymen of their belief in the justice of the British cause. Hardly less striking as an evidence of sympathy was the subscription, due originally to the initiative of Mr. Bernard Baker, of a fund to provide a completely equipped hospital ship, the *Maine*, which rendered great service throughout the war, and was eventually presented to the British Government.

Attitude of Japan.

In America, as in Europe, sympathy or antipathy swayed men's views on the merits and the prospects of the war. For a judgment, friendly and yet dispassionate, based on broad generalisation, yet full of the insight of accurate knowledge, we must look to a nation whose emergence from mediæval seclusion to the position of one of the Great Powers was then only foreseen by a few, a nation not yet known to the world as the ally of England and the equal adversary of mighty Russia. A study of the Japanese Press, official and unofficial, during the crisis, reveals an unprejudiced estimate of the underlying causes of the war, a clear appreciation of England's military defects and of the inherent difficulties of the situation, joined to a serenely confident verdict as to the inevitable conclusion and the shape the settlement would take, that can be found nowhere else.† The friendliness of Japan was in part,

* Mr. Adalbert Hay died suddenly in June, 1901.

† See the *Times* of November 17, 1899, and February 23, 1900, for some interesting extracts.

no doubt, due to a recognition of England's abstention from the interference of the three Powers in 1895, and of her generally less aggressive and more disinterested policy in the Far East, but even more, perhaps, to a realization of the fact that any cause which would weaken England's restraining influence would be a direct encouragement to Russian and German ambitions in the future. In any case it was genuine, and was shared by the whole nation, and by none more than by the wise monarch who has presided over the marvellous transformation of the last few decades.

Attitude of the European Governments.

But interesting as is the study of the sentiments of the nations at large, it must be remembered that as far as any practical consequences were concerned, everything during these critical weeks hung upon the attitude of the governments of the three great European Powers—Germany, France and Russia. Were they prepared to avail themselves of the general feeling against England in order to combine for a united attack upon the British Empire? The danger in which England stood was very serious. How near it came, what plans were discussed, what informal negotiations opened, may never, perhaps, be fully revealed. All that it is possible to do, for the present, is to estimate the different factors involved, and form some probable conclusion. That any attempt at intervention would be uncompromisingly rejected by the British Government was not only made probable by the temper of the British public, but was also directly indicated by Lord Salisbury himself. Unless, therefore, they were prepared to accept an open rebuff, the European Powers could only consider intervention as a diplomatic pretext for war. And war with England would, even for a triple alliance, have been a very formidable undertaking. The numerical superiority of the allied fleets was by no means sufficient to make victory over the homogeneous British squadrons a certainty. And on the issue of the naval conflict France and Germany would have had to stake their colonial possessions and their over-sea commerce, while Russia, who had least to lose externally, had most to fear from the internal consequences of financial exhaustion.

German policy: the Anglo-German agreement.

Even if success had been assured, that success was by no means equally desirable to each of the Powers at that moment. Germany, the Power which had most to gain, and most openly avowed her aspirations to succeed to the British heritage, was far from being prepared for the struggle for the spoils which would inevitably follow victory. To destroy British sea supremacy, with its steadying and conservative pressure upon international politics, in order to replace it by the supremacy of aggressive Russia, or of a France which had not yet forgotten Alsace-Lorraine, would have been a fatal mistake for Germany to commit. That in itself is no absolute proof that it would not have been committed, but the evidence pointing to German attempts to bring about a general intervention is too scanty at present to furnish grounds for a definite judgment. It is true that in 1895 Baron Marschall had categorically insisted upon the independence of the Transvaal as being a German interest, and that the Emperor's telegram in 1896 was followed by an attempt to stir up France and Russia to intervene. But the failure of this attempt, and the uncompromising attitude of England, followed up by Lord Salisbury's far-seeing diplomacy, had led Germany to reconsider her whole position on this issue. The Anglo-German agreement of 1897 with regard to the Portuguese possessions in Africa was avowedly a renunciation of Germany's South African ambitions, a renunciation emphasized only a few months before the outbreak of the war by Mr. Rhodes's visit to the Emperor, and the seizure of Kiao-Chau was generally understood as a new direction in German policy. So far, indeed, did German official assurances of goodwill go at the outbreak of the war, repeated as they were a few weeks later by the Emperor himself in the course of a visit to his royal grandmother, that Mr. Chamberlain, speaking at Leicester on December 5, ventured in all good faith to refer to Germany—coupling her name with that of the United States—as almost an ally. The British defeats were, no doubt, a sore temptation, and if the other Powers had given a decisive lead for intervention, Germany would hardly have stood outside. But she could not openly

give the lead herself, and if she endeavoured to elicit the suggestion of intervention from others, the response was so tentative and uncertain that the best that could be done was to pay no heed to it, in order to win credit with the British Government for so doing. But these are matters for speculation, and we need not assume any other motive than a prudent, if somewhat narrow, statesmanship for the policy followed during the crisis and throughout the war by the German Emperor and his ministers. Refusing to let the popular agitation against England, which they had themselves deliberately encouraged, move them one hair's breadth from the correct neutrality upon which they had decided, they were no less resolved that it should not be wasted or frittered away in mere friction between the government and the public. The function mapped out for it was to further those schemes of naval expansion which the Emperor had so much at heart, but which had hitherto found such lukewarm support. The detention of the *Bundesrath* and other German steamers by British cruisers off Delagoa Bay, on the suspicion of carrying contraband goods, was utilized with great parliamentary skill, though with a certain lack of international courtesy, by Count von Bülow to work up the Reichstag to sanction a considerable enlargement of a naval programme which they had only very reluctantly accepted just before. As far as its immediate object went, the German official policy was an undoubted success. What it left out of account was the *imponderabile* of its effect upon public opinion in England. The ill-will and the frequently exaggerated suspicion of German policy, which in England have succeeded the ignorantly complacent belief in the value of German friendship, have become political factors which have certainly not strengthened the difficult international position of the German Empire.

Restraining influences in Russia.

In Russia, the Emperor Nicholas's sentimental love of peace, which only a few months earlier had led to the inception of the famous Hague Conference, and his personal regard for the British Royal Family, were undoubtedly factors in restraining the mischievous machinations of his Foreign Minister Muravieff to bring about intervention, and the ardour of the military party at court for a forward policy

in Afghanistan. But there were even more powerful practical considerations. The lessons of the South African War themselves indicated to a serious soldier like General Kuropatkin how difficult it might prove to deal with the Afghans alone, quite apart from English assistance, before the completion of the strategical railway system in Central Asia. So, beyond some attempts to open intrigue with the Amir, nothing was done in that direction. The hurrying forward of its Far Eastern policy was, moreover, fully occupying the Russian Government, which in a vague way felt the Japanese danger without realizing its full significance. Lastly, the great policy of internal development initiated by M. Witte was still far from yielding that increase of the national resources which was necessary for the conduct of a great war; in fact the cost of such a war might have wrecked that policy as completely then as it is wrecking it now.

The policy of peaceful principle in France.

In France, again, there were internal reasons sufficiently strong to rule out any policy of adventure. The country was still in the throes of that constitutional crisis of which the Dreyfus affair was but a symbol. The Parliamentary Republic was barely holding its own against the forces of reaction. Peace, within and without, was the first necessity of M. Waldeck-Rousseau's government to enable it to repair the breaches in the republican stronghold, and to reassert the authority of the constitution over the nation. If one were to try and differentiate between the policy of the French Government and that of the other two Powers, one might describe it as being based on broad grounds of peaceful principle rather than on particular prudential considerations.* It was not a policy that at the time altogether commended itself to the French people, but it has commended itself since, and the event has triumphantly vindicated M. Delcassé's belief that his country stood to gain far more by the maintenance of friendly relations with England than by taking part in any attempt to overthrow violently the whole balance of world power.

* A particular consideration, but one appealing to the French public rather than to the government, was the near approach of the great Paris Exhibition of 1900.

The resultant conduct of the Governments.

And so, for one reason or another, the governments of the great European Powers decided to disregard popular clamour and to preserve an attitude of strictly correct and even benevolent neutrality. Not only was there no intervention in the South African struggle, but no attempt was made to raise other thorny questions, such as that of the British occupation of Egypt. Each Power preferred to pursue its independent policy as before, only making use, as far as it could, of England's preoccupation with South Africa to push its own interests as vigorously as possible. That England should continue thus preoccupied was eminently desirable. And accordingly there was nothing incompatible between the avowed policy of non-intervention and the secret encouragement of the Boers to continue the struggle to the bitter end. How far the vague half-promises, believed to have been officially made to Dr. Leyds before the war in more than one quarter, were now renewed, how far irresponsible agitation for intervention was deliberately encouraged in order to raise in the minds of the Boers expectations which were never intended to be fulfilled, are questions to which a complete answer may never perhaps be forthcoming. Of one thing at least we may be certain: that the policy adopted by the Powers towards the Boers was untainted by the consideration of any interests save their own.

The lesson for England.

It would be premature at this point to enter at length into the various fluctuations of Continental feeling as the war progressed: the sudden friendliness after our first successes when it seemed as if the war was practically settled; the second outburst of hatred, more rancorous and malignant even than the first, which accompanied the prolongation of the guerilla war; the final reconciliation after the peace. They have their own interest for the political psychologist, and their own bearing on the continued resistance of the Boers. But they never possessed the dynamic power of that great wave of sentiment, which, during the few weeks that are covered by the narrative of this volume, threatened to sweep the governments of Europe off their feet towards the Armageddon of universal war. Englishmen should never forget that the causes of the crisis through which they then

passed still largely exist. To diminish that danger, and to strengthen the means by which it was in fact averted, should be the guiding principle of our foreign policy in the future. It was the policy of temporizing and improvisation, of reluctance to concede anything, and yet greater reluctance to make plain what we considered worth fighting for, that had contributed at one and the same moment to make all the great Powers of Europe our enemies. A clear knowledge of our own intentions and aspirations should enable us to avoid causes of irritation and conflict by broad settlements, wherever peaceful settlement is possible, and to concentrate our political and military attention on those dangers that at any particular period seem least avoidable. The Anglo-German Agreement was an attempt to arrive at such a settlement, and may be considered as having, for the time, at any rate, effected its object. The recent convention with France has, with the public applause of both nations, cleared an even wider field of possible controversies. Again, the enmity of Europe came to nothing in the actual event, and for two reasons. Our supremacy at sea remained untouched. The patriotic uprising of the nation, both in England and in the colonies, revealed sources of strength, defensive and offensive, behind the fleet, whose existence had hardly been suspected by the outside world. It is in holding fast, at all costs, to our heritage of sea power, in developing the unity of our Empire, and in fostering within it the spirit of patriotism and the use of arms, without which that patriotism loses most of its value, that the path of safety is to be found.

CHAPTER IV

THE BOERS AND THE CRISIS

Dingaan's Day in the Republics.

For sixty years the anniversary of that memorable 16th of December on which the little band of stout-hearted *voor-trekkers* beat back the furious onset of Dingaan's spearmen had been for the Boers a day of public rejoicing and of solemn thanksgiving to the God whom, like the Israelites of old, they believed to watch with a peculiar care over their national existence and their national aspirations. But never had they celebrated the occasion with better right than on the day which followed the crowning mercy of Colenso. The sons of the men who had gone forth to escape from the restraints of British rule and to seek their fortune in the wilderness, they stood once more on British soil, not as exiles returned from a vain quest, but as conquerors whose stubborn grip the armed might of England had proved powerless to loose. They had reached the culminating point of their brief history; whether their victories were destined to mark the first step towards a great national future, or the last successful effort of a movement contending vainly against the spirit of the age and against overmastering natural forces, depended on what they would do, and what they would show themselves to be, during the next few weeks.

Absence of emotion.

Outwardly, the Boers displayed but little emotion during these days. Strangers staying in the capitals of the Republics were amazed at the silent impassivity with which the tidings of successive British defeats were received. Even the solemn celebrations of victory appointed by President Kruger for the 16th and 17th of December were marked by few other manifestations, whether in the laagers or in the towns, than

the greater length and earnestness of the customary sermons comparing the history of the two chosen peoples. It is a commonplace that the actors in great events are not only slower to grasp their full significance than spectators who regard them in the better perspective afforded by distance, whether of time or space, but are also not infrequently far less elated or depressed by the changes of fortune that appear so intensely dramatic when viewed from outside. And in this war the whole Boer nation was an actor, and could afford to be free from the agonized fear or the riotous intoxication of joy which swept through a nation like the British, which was on the whole a mere spectator, dependent for all that it valued most on the service of men to whom in peace it had grudged the money, and still more the opportunity, to make themselves efficient. And even apart from this, the Boers, with their intense individualism, possessed little of the faculty for collective emotion. That instinct to crowd together and give vent to its feelings in critical times which characterizes an urban community is much weaker in men accustomed to the solitary life of the veld. Yet it would be a mistake to look upon the Boers as a nation of "Ironsides," with a fierce inward resolve burning beneath a calm surface. The absence of emotional display corresponded to no small extent to a real absence of strong emotion. They were, as a whole, too unimaginative and ignorant to realize all that the struggle involved for them. They were satisfied with having won, as they expected they would, they were glad that for the moment the unpleasant business of fighting was over, and they had no doubt that, after a few more attempts, the English would yield as they had yielded before.

Boer expectations and ambitions.

What the terms should be when the English had wearied of repeating their fruitless efforts to force their way through the Boer positions, was nowhere very clearly defined. The more sanguine "young Afrikanders" and enthusiastic fanatics like Mr. Reitz thought that the time had already come for the final expulsion of the British Power from South Africa and the creation of the great Afrikander Republic, and their sentiments were freely expressed in the Republican Press. But the ambitions of the more responsible men,

though far-reaching enough, were more moderate. The old President, holding with stubborn tenacity to the objective towards which he had been struggling for so many years, was resolved that free access to the open sea should be the price of peace. Whether that access was to involve the annexation of Natal and the cession of Durban, and thus regain what the *voortrekkers* had failed to secure, or whether it would only be a strip through Zululand, would depend on the measure of success gained, and the discouragement of the English. Mafeking and Bechuanaland, too, were generally considered as rightful appendages of the Transvaal, whose sovereignty had already been decided by the success of the invasion and the acquiescence of the population. In a similar spirit, the Free Staters generally regarded Kimberley and Griqualand West as definitely Free State territory, while the more forward spirits among them insisted that the invaded districts south of the Orange River should, on the conclusion of peace, be allowed to decide for themselves whether they would remain British territory or not. President Steyn, indeed, though in a wavering half-hearted fashion he acquiesced in the wholesale annexation of British territory, always spoke of the war as a struggle for independence only, and a speech of his delivered in the laager at Ladysmith on January 24, in which the purely defensive note seemed somewhat strongly emphasized, evoked considerable dissatisfaction among the party of conquest, who, however, consoled themselves with the thought that the object of the speech was mainly justificatory, and need not imply any definite limitation of policy. In Europe Dr. Leyds, with equally studious moderation, declared that the Republics would be satisfied with a payment of their war expenses and a full recognition of their sovereign *status*.

Joubert's advocacy of peace.

There were many, no doubt, who did not share these illusions. But the only one who dared declare his disbelief in the possibility of final success was General Joubert. He had urged the necessity of peace upon the President as early as the end of November, on his return from the Estcourt expedition, and was to do so more than once during the next few months. That Joubert's views on

this subject, coupled with his inborn hesitation and timidity, hardly fitted him for the military position he continued to hold, may be admitted, without detracting from the inherent wisdom of his advice. An offer of peace, coupled with the acceptance of all the demands put forward by Lord Milner at the Bloemfontein conference, would have been very difficult for the British Government to refuse without definitely throwing the mass of the Liberal party in England into active opposition to the war, and still further exciting continental hostility. Those terms had never from the first implied any danger to the independence of the Transvaal, and if there had been any such danger the immense gain of prestige to the Transvaal would have more than counteracted it. But Kruger would hear none of "Slim Piet's" warnings. For all his ability, craft and determination, he was not the man to rise to the wise statesmanship of the Kaffir Moshesh, who secured his sovereignty and the independence of the Basuto tribe by timely concession in the hour of victory.

Weakness of the Boer national spirit.

But if the decision was to be not peace but the continuation of the war, then everything depended on the action of the Boers being swift and decided. With their vastly inferior resources, the one chance of success lay in making the utmost use of their advantage at the moment. The British forces had been defeated, but their actual losses had not been great, nor had their spirit been seriously impaired. The arrival of reinforcements would soon more than make up for what they had lost. At all costs, then, it was necessary for the Boers to make a great effort to convert the British defeats into the rout and annihilation of the whole British force in South Africa before ever it could be strengthened and recover for another attack. Every available fighting man, burgher, Cape rebel, or foreigner, should have been hurried to the front and an immediate offensive should have been undertaken and continued without a moment's rest, till the British troops had been driven down to the coast, or even expelled from South Africa altogether. Fortunately, neither the national spirit nor the military organization of the Boers proved equal to their great

opportunity. As a nation they had gone to war, not so much because they were impelled by any overmastering passion—religious fanaticism, republican zeal, or even active race hatred—or by any desperate resolve to perish rather than yield to oppression, as because they were tired of the irritating interference of the British Government with their internal affairs, and thought that war might put an end to that, as well as help to realize those external aspirations which the British Government had so consistently thwarted. They had begun the campaign confidently, and with an unconcealed contempt for their opponent. They did not contemplate a long war, for they hoped that the British Government and people would soon get tired. They hardly contemplated invasion, still less devastation, of their country, and political annihilation, for they hoped that if by any chance the fortune of war went against them, Providence, through the agency of the European Powers, would intervene to preserve them from the consequences of defeat. Their success, instead of urging them to redoubled effort, only confirmed them in their optimism. In fact, their incapacity to take war seriously was only equalled by that of their opponents.

Inherent military weakness of the Boers.

As an army, they possessed neither the discipline of regular soldiers nor the enthusiasm which inspired the levies of revolutionary France or the Dervishes of the Sudan. To most of them fighting was only an unpleasantly dangerous civic duty, and though they could fight well when the occasion demanded, they preferred to await the occasion rather than to provoke it. It was this negative attitude of mind, with the perfectly natural tendency to run the least amount of risk compatible with the individual conscience and the law, which, combined with the lack of discipline, made any bold offensive military action almost impossible. The leaders only reflected the general attitude of the burghers by whom they were elected. Neither the hope of promotion or glory, nor yet the fear of disgrace or the guillotine, were present to stimulate them to extraordinary exertions. They were neither professional soldiers nor new men thrown up by a great crisis, but the ordinary political chiefs of the nation,

and in the Transvaal they more especially represented the corrupt oligarchy of the Kruger régime. The course of the war was yet to eliminate many of these weaknesses, to introduce a semblance of discipline, to inspire a sterner spirit, and to put power into the hands of leaders of determination and ambition, but not till the occasion when they might have done great things had passed. Not a few, indeed, of those destined to lead later already saw what was required. But they had not yet won the influence which could have enabled them to carry out their plans. In vain Christian De Wet and Hertzog pressed for a bold advance into Cape Colony, in vain young Smuts, State-Attorney and warrior, clamoured for the assault of Ladysmith, in vain Botha appealed for leave to push into the heart of Natal. It was not only the War Council at Bloemfontein or Joubert at Modderspruit whose timidity vetoed these schemes, but the deadweight of general indifference and unorganization that it was yet to take many months to overcome.

Steyn and Kruger.

After all, if energy at the head alone had been able to impel the Boers into vigorous action, that energy was not wholly lacking. President Steyn, though *ex officio* Commander-in-Chief of the Free State forces, was not a strategist, and his reluctance to sanction any bold action in Cape Colony was an undoubted mistake. But his zeal and activity in keeping his burgher levies together, in organizing their supplies, inspecting their camps, and raising their spirit by vigorous patriotic speeches, deserve all due recognition. And if Joubert was timid and inert in the command of forces whose success he disbelieved in, it should not be forgotten that the real Commander-in-Chief of the Transvaal forces for all the earlier months of the war was President Kruger himself. From his office in Pretoria the old President directly controlled, as far as control was possible, the operations of the whole of his forces at every point. A constant stream of telegrams came from the laagers appealing for his counsel even on matters of tactical detail, and was answered by a stream of orders, suggestions and exhortations. This was not the unintelligent interference of a civilian strategist dominated by political considerations. It was as a fighter

General Schalk W. Burger.
Vice-President S. African Republic, 1900.
Photo by Steger.

that Kruger had first made his mark among his countrymen, and he had been Commandant-General almost as many years as he had since been President. Even in 1881, though he no longer took the field, he had largely directed the course of the campaign. He knew the personal character and the fighting quality of all the older men. And the very defect of the Boer Army, the unwillingness to execute any order that did not meet the individual's approval, prevented any of the ill effects which might otherwise have resulted from an excessive centralization. All that Kruger was really able to do was to exhort. And his exhortation throughout was in one direction only—bolder policy, greater energy. On January 8, after the failure of the attack on Ladysmith, he issued a circular letter to all the officers in the field and to all the magistrates, whose gist, enforced by many scriptural quotations that recall the days of Puritan warfare, is the need for energy, and yet more energy, and the duty of burghers to cease shirking service and go out to fight not only for their country but for their own farms, whose destruction and confiscation would otherwise be assured. But even Kruger, with all his strength of will and his influence, could not achieve his purpose in a moment. The causes of the Boer failure, as well as the causes of Boer success, were inherent in the national character and the national organization.

Difficulty of augmenting the forces.

The first necessity for the Boers was to increase their fighting strength in the field. At the initial mobilization not more than two-thirds of the men bound to serve had actually come forward, and a vigorous enforcement of the law ought to have added another 15,000 to 20,000 men to the commandos at the front. But, in spite of the efforts of Kruger and Steyn, seconded more or less energetically by the commandants and magistrates, the sweeping up of the laggards proved a slow task. The Boer, though readier to obey a law than a personal order, was very far from considering himself bound to render unqualified obedience if his inclinations went strongly the other way, and the elected officials rarely had the hardihood to enforce the fines and penalties imposed by the law on a free burgher who pre-

ferred to take his own line of action.* Even more difficult was it, with the Boer resources for enforcing the law, to deal with those shirkers who left home for the front but took care never to arrive there. Hundreds of these were to be found everywhere on the lines of communication, having attached themselves unasked to bridge guards, supply depôts, hospitals, or to the administration of occupied towns.

The plague of leave.

While the officials were laboriously driving up reluctant warriors to swell the commandos, those same commandos were being depleted by the wholesale exodus of burghers on leave to their homes. Burghers were entitled to leave at the end of three months' service, and no consideration of national emergency could induce them to forego their rights. The tents of the generals were besieged by crowds of applicants, and the granting and refusing of leave was for weeks the principal work of the leaders of the Boer forces. At first there was no system, and the most importunate got their way; but by degrees arrangements were made by which small batches, not exceeding 10 per cent. of each commando, could go away for ten days or a fortnight in rotation. Many, indeed, went off without leave if they thought that the general had failed to realize the importance of their business at home; others extracted medical certificates from complaisant doctors; a few even went to the length of shooting themselves through the foot to escape the danger and weariness of service.

The leave system inevitable.

The *verlofpest* (plague of leave), as the Boers called it, was no doubt a serious evil, but it was an inevitable one. Any attempt to refuse leave absolutely would probably have only led to demoralization and wholesale desertion. No unprofessional army can take the field for many months without becoming home-sick and war-weary, a fact British commanders, too, were destined before long to experience in the case of the forces whom voluntary patriotism led to the front from Great Britain and from the colonies. Moreover, in an

* Typical is the following appeal issued to the burghers of Vryheid:—"Well-beloved burghers and friends, I cannot do otherwise than entreat you not to disappoint us further. It is a very hard task for us to threaten our burghers with the law, so I would beg of you all in a friendly manner of one accord to proceed to Ladysmith, without incurring the rigour of the law.—Your well-intentioned friend, P. M. Bester, Landdrost."

army like that of the Boers, where so little was provided by the military organization and so much was left to the individual burgher, the leave system was necessary for other than psychological reasons. The burgher went home not only to take a short holiday, but also to refit. He returned well-fed and rested, with new or carefully patched clothes, with a fresh pony—leaving the spent one to recover condition at leisure—and with a good store of home-made luxuries to supplement the monotony of government rations. And even if we admit that a stronger sense of patriotism and a better organization would have made the Boer armies far more effective at this critical stage, yet we must reflect that if Boer patriotism and Boer military organization had been based on British models, the two Republics between them would not have been able to put in the field more than a thousand regulars and another two or three thousand militia and volunteers. The organization of the Boer Army may have been imperfect, and individual burghers may have shirked freely, but, unlike ourselves, they had not as a nation shirked the citizen's first duty or tried to build up a military system on an insecure foundation.

The Boers and foreign voluntary aid.

Failing then the possibility of keeping a still larger proportion of their small population in the field, the Republics still had two other sources to look to for an increase of their fighting forces. There was the Afrikander population of the Cape Colony and Natal, and there were the foreign volunteers. Several volunteer corps had been raised at the outbreak of war among the foreign residents of Pretoria and Johannesburg, and every ship that landed in Delagoa Bay for the next four or five months brought its contingent of enthusiasts, soldiers of fortune and desperadoes. But it would be a mistake to suppose that the Boer Governments made any deliberate attempt to recruit a mercenary force in Europe.* Neither the finances of the Republics nor their supplies of food and ammunition would have allowed of the maintenance of a force of any size. The attempt to smuggle in any large body would only have provoked a British occupation of Lorenzo Marques and thus have closed their avenue

* See vol. ii., pp. 86, 87.

of communication with the outside world. But the most cogent reason of all against recruiting mercenaries was that the Boers did not consider Europeans worth recruiting. They accepted the arrival of volunteers as a proof that God had touched the heart of the European nations * and as an indication of the probability of intervention by their governments. Altogether there was much in their attitude towards the assistance proffered them that suggests a parallel with the original attitude of the British War Office and the British Army towards the offers of volunteers from England and the colonies. The only form of foreign help of which the Boers really considered themselves to stand in need, and which they actively welcomed, was that which could be rendered by foreign ambulances and hospitals. Hollander, German, French, Russian ambulances were all arriving about this time and proved themselves of the very greatest service. As for the volunteers who had come to fight, they were welcome to join a commando or to band together to form commandos of their own, and the Government on its side was ready to fit them out with horse, saddle and gun, and to feed them in the field. Pay there was none, at least not in the majority of cases, though the Government settled their hotel bills at Pretoria, and though no doubt there was a general understanding that those who did well for the republican cause should have their reward at the end of the war at the expense of the British Uitlanders.

The foreign volunteers at Pretoria.

Rarely has a more motley gathering been seen than that which collected together in Pretoria during the opening weeks of the year. Intending warriors of every nationality, resplendent in the uniforms of every army under the sun, or in the still more picturesque garb and terrifying armoury which the individual buccaneer's bold fantasy might devise, jostled each other in the galleries of the Government buildings, or displayed their equestrian prowess in the

* *Cf.* Kruger's words of welcome to a party of German volunteers: "Thank you for coming. Don't imagine that we had need of you. Transvaal wants no foreign help. But as you wish to fight for us you are welcome. I take your coming as a gratifying sign that Europe is gradually beginning to recognise the right of the Afrikander nation."—Franko Seiner, 'Erinnerungen eines Deutschen Burenkämpfers.'

astonished market-place of the sleepy little capital. Of those who came out after the war started, a very large proportion consisted of retired or cashiered officers of different European armies, each and all imbued with the belief that they would be welcomed with enthusiasm by the Boers to lead their forces, and that they might thus easily acquire the military distinction they had failed to reach at home. Great was the astonishment and indignation of these aspirants to fame when they discovered the true state of affairs on arrival at Pretoria. The interviews between them and State Secretary Reitz, who would blandly wave aside their imposing military credentials, genuine or fictitious, and ask them if they could ride or shoot, and what corps they wished to join, were often of the most comic description. Not a few returned in disgust without making any attempt to get to the front. But the majority, anxious to see real fighting, afraid of ridicule at home, or short of money for a return ticket, made a virtue of necessity, and joined the various foreign corps as common troopers. Besides the officers, there was a fair sprinkling of the humbler rank of soldiers of fortune, men who had served in the French foreign legion, or the Dutch army in the East Indies, or played their part in South American revolutions, or in Cuba. Others again were genuine enthusiasts, men without the slightest experience or knowledge of what precisely they wished to do, but only anxious to help the Boers or injure England as best they could. Like our own Yeomanry and Volunteers, most of these soon developed into quite useful fighters.

The disreputable element.

Lastly, there was a very strong contingent of cosmopolitan rascality, gathered together for the opportunities of loot and swindling which war affords. Not many of these remained long at the front when they found how little the South African veld had to yield to their enterprise. In Pretoria there was more scope, and several of them did good business by selling the horses and outfit provided by the Government to local contractors, from whom the Government in turn repurchased them. Many succeeded in carrying out this trick five or six times over; others

carried on the yet more remunerative wholesale business of raising volunteer corps, either entirely fictitious, or, more usually, in a constant state of dissolution and reorganization. Johannesburg, the city of gold, was still more attractive to these gentry, and it needed all the vigilance of the Boer officials, aided by a specially raised force of police, to keep their predatory instincts in check. It was these men and their kin, with the foreign corps in the field, who were afterwards so eager to blow up the mines and wreck Johannesburg, and whose presence in Johannesburg after the British occupation caused so much anxiety to the military administration.

Boer hopes of colonial rebellion.

There was, however, one source from which the Boers did expect a large reinforcement of their commandos, and a reinforcement whose military value they believed in. The whole Boer plan of campaign had been based on the confident expectation that on the outbreak of war at least 30,000 to 40,000 colonial rebels would at once of their own accord spring to arms, destroy the railway lines, and occupy the whole high veld region of central and western Cape Colony. This confidence was misplaced, and the mistake had cost the Boers dear during the critical opening weeks of the war. In consequence of it, the middle of November had found them still dawdling with inadequate forces at Belmont, Colesberg, and Stormberg, when they ought to have been almost at the gates of Cape Town and Port Elizabeth. A month later the British defeats once more put within their grasp the chance they had missed. A vigorous advance into the heart of Cape Colony after Stormberg and Magersfontein would have been as successful as at the outbreak of war, or even more so, inasmuch as it might have brought about the cutting off and annihilation of the detached British forces at the front. But once again the Boers proved unequal to their opportunity. Freed from the immediate menace of a British advance, they settled down in the districts they had occupied, and busied themselves with adjusting the civil administration to that of the Republics, and with dividing the spoils of office. They failed to realize that as long as there was a British army "in being"

their annexations were but provisional and not worth organizing, except for the one purpose of levying recruits. Of these, indeed, they managed to raise some 6,000–8,000 altogether by the end of January. But for every week that they spent in inactivity before that date, they lost an almost equal number whom they might have secured by an energetic advance.

Raising rebels a matter of offensive strategy.

The fact is that for the Boers the question of increasing their fighting force was one of strategy and not of administrative measures. Yet never was their lack of strategy more signally displayed than in the weeks that followed Colenso. It was an unparalleled opportunity. Not only had they isolated and invested Ladysmith and Kimberley, but they had for the time being reduced the relieving forces to impotence. To capture these two places and then to invest Buller and Methuen as they had already invested White and Kekewich, to chase French and Gatacre to the coast, and to make Lord Roberts meet his Magersfontein or Colenso at Hex River or on the hills above Maritzburg, were successes that were none of them unattainable. On the other hand their actual position, if they remained on the defensive, was anything but a good one. On the Tugela they were wedged in between two British forces together almost double their strength. The position on the western border was similar, and though the disparity in numbers was not so great, the dependence of their whole force for its chief source of supplies on wagon transport over a line almost one hundred miles from the base at Bloemfontein, a line moreover running at right angles to the enemy's line of advance and entirely exposed, made the maintenance of their force there not only a matter of extraordinary difficulty from the administrative point of view, but also, in its strategical aspect, one of the gravest risk. It was, in fact, this locking up of their main forces at the two extreme flanks of the theatre of war that left them too weak in the centre to make any effective attempt to utilize the great opportunity of raising Cape Colony in rebellion.

Boer indolence.

Yet no endeavour worthy of the name was made by the Boers either to make use of this immense but fleeting chance,

or to extricate themselves from their awkward position. Instead of resuming the initiative after their successes, they relapsed more and more into that attitude of passive defence and waiting on events which is the sure precursor of defeat in war. They waited in their trenches at the Modder River and the Tugela for the next attack, which would, no doubt, be a repetition of the last; they waited round the besieged garrisons for the white flag which would, no doubt, be hoisted in a week or two. And while waiting they made themselves comfortable. The great wagon laagers, which had been left behind at the Drakensberg or in the Western Transvaal at the first invasion, lumbered along to the front during November and December, and were followed by an ever increasing stream of wagons from the farms of burghers in the field. With the wagons came not only the Kaffir drivers, but also the wives and even the children of the burghers. Joubert at Ladysmith endeavoured, not altogether successfully, to keep the invasion of women from coming nearer than Elandslaagte,* but in the other laagers there was hardly even a pretence of interfering with the desire of the burghers for the recreations of domestic life. Everywhere, almost, the Boers tended more and more to look upon the war as a gigantic picnic, in which free rations and the diversion afforded by the daily bombardment, or by the reports of scouting parties, more than compensated for the discomfort of sweltering summer days spent dozing in stuffy tents or stuffier trenches.

The absence of discipline.

Here again the fault lay not so much in the defects of particular leaders as in the inherent weakness of the Boer military organization. The Boers, when the war began, were not organized for carrying on effectively an offensive campaign. The impetus of their original advance spent itself the moment they came in contact with any solid resistance, whether in the shape of an intrenched camp like Ladysmith, or of a field army. By the end of November they had completely abandoned the strategical initiative at every point, and their

* Mrs. Joubert, indeed, whose position as her husband's chief military counsellor was generally recognised and acquiesced in by the Boers, remained in the general's camp as a special exception.

victories in December, due less to strategical or tactical skill on the part of their own leaders than to the blunders of British generals or the defects of British tactical training, did nothing to revive it. Discipline alone could remedy this evil. But the tradition of it was foreign to the most individualist of peoples, and neither leaders nor burghers were as yet sufficiently in earnest about the war to attempt to enforce or to carry out the measures that were essential to military efficiency. Time, indeed, was to see great improvement in that respect. But time was destined in the meanwhile to do far more for their opponents, to develop more of the latent strength of the British Empire, to correct tactical inexperience, and to bring forward the leader who should take the initiative into his hands and change the course of the war.

The scouting corps.

The only improvement worth mentioning in the organization of the Boer forces in the field is the raising, during this period, of several corps of scouts to make up for the absence of any organized system of patrolling or field intelligence. The originator of the scouting corps was a young lawyer from Krugersdorp, Mr. Danie Theron, who, at the outbreak of the war, started a small body of cyclists, which gradually developed into the corps that, under the name of Theron's Scouts, performed numberless feats of audacity, and proved itself invaluable to the Boers during the months that followed the occupation of Bloemfontein. A corps on similar lines was organized in Natal soon after Christmas, 1899, by Mr. Edwards, and others, such as Ricchiardi's Italians, Hassell's Americans, Runck's and von Goeben's Scouts, followed later. It does not appear that the members of these corps were selected for any special scouting aptitudes. They were mainly adventurous men who wished for more activity and excitement than was furnished by the ordinary course of laager life. Some of these corps consisted wholly of foreigners, and in the rest they were present in considerable proportions. The Boer was no doubt by nature and local knowledge far better fitted for the task of scouting, but he was, as a rule, too indolent and too cautious to bring in really valuable information.

Ammunition, equipment, supplies.

Another difficulty, besides the numerical insufficiency of their forces, that already began to give anxiety to the Boer Government, was that of keeping those forces supplied with all the necessaries of war. The deficiency in artillery could no longer be made good, except by capture. But guns were repaired, and one howitzer was actually made, at the Netherlands Railway works at Pretoria, and artillery and rifle ammunition of very fair quality was turned out by the dynamite factory and by Begbie's works at Johannesburg.* As regards the transport, remount, supply and clothing departments, the work was considerably lightened by the self-sufficing character of the Boer army, whose real administrative base was the farms of the burghers. Still, there remained an enormous amount to do. For the Transvaal, a central committee at Pretoria, under the presidency of Mr. A. D. Wolmarans, of the Executive Council, directed the purchase or commandeering and the distribution and expedition of horses and goods, while subsidiary local committees were formed in all the other towns. Similar arrangements were made in the Free State, under the direction of the Council of War at Bloemfontein. A burgher clothing factory was started in Johannesburg in December, 1899, which fulfilled the double purpose of providing clothes and giving employment to the wives of poor burghers. Elsewhere the Government distributed shirting and cloth to be made up by the women in return for help in the way of rations. Flour was similarly given out to be baked into bread, or Boer rusks, though there were also large bakeries in Johannesburg and elsewhere.

Importation; Delagoa Bay; finance.

As regards the actual stock of necessaries in the country, there was no cause for apprehension as far as the chief essentials, viz., horses, trek oxen, meat and mealie meal, were concerned. But as regards clothing, saddlery, tinned provisions, coffee, sugar, etc., the surplus which had been accumulated before the war, or had been brought about by the exodus of the bulk of the Uitlander population, was already showing signs of depletion. Importation through Delagoa Bay was the only remedy. But importation was

* See vol. ii., pp. 69, 70, 82, 83.

beset by considerable difficulties. It was doubtful for some time whether the British Government would not declare all such articles contraband of war as being obviously destined to support the Boer forces in the field. During December and January, indeed, British men-of-war practically blockaded the bay, and took several German steamers off to Durban to be examined. Subsequently, however, the British authorities confined themselves mainly to buying up the cargoes as they arrived. Another difficulty that was experienced at first was that merchants were reluctant to import goods simply in order to have them requisitioned without payment by the Boer officials, and an ordinance was accordingly issued at the end of December exempting imported goods from "commandeering." This, of course, meant a certain expenditure of ready money. But the Transvaal was not badly provided in this respect. There was a cash reserve in the banks at the end of December of £2,400,000. Ten of the mines, five of them worked directly by the Government, were running during January, and turned out £350,000 worth of gold in the month. To increase the amount available for government use, a new gold law was passed at the end of December, by which the mines were to be taxed to the extent of 30 per cent. of their nett output.

The Boer civil administration.

On the whole, the supply aspect of the campaign was, in a rough and ready manner, well managed. The commandos were well fed and well supplied with ammunition, remounts, and every other necessary. When we consider that all the arrangements to enable this to be done had to be improvised by a small staff already fully occupied with its ordinary peace duties, with the working of the mines and the organizing of the labour supply for the farms in the absence of the farmers, we must acknowledge that the Boer civil administration rose to the occasion in a remarkable manner. Yet even in this great national emergency Boer officialdom was unable altogether to shake off the habits to which it was accustomed in peace. Dishonesty and malversation of every sort were rampant, and there were apparently few among the officials, from the departmental officers concerned in providing for the army, down to the field-cornets and corporals

who distributed supplies in the field, who did not take the unjust steward for their pattern. Even individual burghers, when on leave, did good business with the sale of their horses and equipment, while others were discovered taking home for future use large cases full of new clothing or tinned provisions which had been issued to them. In this, as in every other respect, the Boers only showed that the characteristics and habits which a nation allows itself to acquire in peace will inevitably dominate its conduct in war. No degree of patriotic fervour can then dispel the effects of political unsoundness; neither vast resources nor natural aptitude for war can then compensate for lack of forethought or cure deep-rooted indiscipline.

CHAPTER V

THE SITUATION IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN COLONIES

Attitude of the Colonial Dutch.

THE situation in Cape Colony at this time was the measure at once of the Boers' miscalculations and of the opportunities which in their inactivity they let slip through their fingers. The key to that situation, as Smuts himself afterwards acknowledged at the Vereeniging conference, was the fact that the Dutch population of the Colony was not ripe for the policy of easy-going confidence which the Republics had pursued with regard to it. Boer emissaries had indeed freely preached rebellion in the border districts and had received satisfactory assurances. But they had not done enough in the way of organization, nor had they reckoned sufficiently on the wide interval that separates platonic declarations of sympathy in time of peace from effective action in the hour of danger. However strong the sympathy of the Dutch colonists for their republican kinsfolk, it was not in itself sufficient to overcome their natural reluctance to face, not only the personal risks of war, but the additional dangers to person and property that would inevitably follow upon unsuccessful rebellion. Nor were fear and self-interest the only restraining forces. The Afrikander is essentially law-abiding and obedient to authority of his own creation. Many whose whole sympathies and wishes were with the Boer cause yet shrank from the idea of themselves violating the law, or of disobeying the proclamations signed by a Prime Minister whom they themselves had put in power. Where the Boers were in occupation, these scruples, as a rule, gave way quickly enough. The presence of the commandos, and their reports, well exaggerated, of Boer victories, gave heart to the timid. Formal annexation

and the enforcement of the republican commando law salved the conscience of the doubtful.* There were, no doubt, exceptions, men who, in spite of the strongest pressure brought to bear upon them, refused to take part in rebellion. Of these some who expressed their views too freely were made prisoners, sent to Pretoria, and generally treated as contumacious rebels for the crime of not rebelling. Others were simply expelled and sent across to the British lines, as was the case with several hundred loyalists from the Vryburg district, including some Afrikanders, who, after many weeks of hardship and contumely, reached Lord Methuen's camp at Modder River in the beginning of February. A few, especially those who had sons or relations on commando, were allowed to stay quietly on their farms. But, generally speaking, it must be admitted that where the Boers were in occupation practically the whole of the Dutch population, led by their most prominent men—in one or two cases including members of Parliament, invariably including almost all the local organizers of the Bond—openly espoused their cause.

The danger of rebellion.

Where, however, the Boer commandos had not penetrated, where the news agencies supplied copious information of British reinforcements and British successes, real or imaginary, where proclamations warning against rebellion and threatening the severest penalties were spread broadcast by the authority of the Prime Minister, there, in spite of much talking and plotting, prudence and orderliness prevailed. Even the Boer victories in December did not have any very immediate effect upon the general attitude. Sedition was talked more freely, rebellious emblems displayed more openly,† a few more young *kerels* sneaked off to the Boer lines, messages

* For detailed evidence on these points see Blue-books Cd. 261 and 420, 1900.

† The wearing of the republican colours in hat ribbons and rosettes was very common all over Cape Colony in the early months of the war, especially before Paardeberg, and in the absence of martial law could not easily be stopped. After martial law was enforced throughout the colony, men no longer dared display their sentiments so openly, but it remained a favourite device of Dutch girls who wished to win a reputation for "patriotic" spirit or to annoy the hapless military commandants.

went freely to the Boer commandants informing them of British movements and asking when the commandos would come, fat *vrouws* baked cakes and pasties, and comely *meisjes* worked at republican banners and favours to welcome the heroes who should deliver them from the British yoke. In the sequel the cakes were eaten at home, or sold to the British troops, the favours hidden away, or even, sad to relate, altered a few weeks later so as to serve as emblems of British loyalty. This, viewed in the dispassionate retrospective of history, is all that actually happened. What it was reasonable, at the time, to expect in any case; what would almost certainly have happened, supposing the flow of British reinforcements had ceased or a fresh series of defeats had followed the first, is a very different question. The fact remains that those who had the fullest information about the feelings and the plannings of the Dutch colonists were prepared to see a general spontaneous outbreak all over the Colony* at any moment during the two months that followed Colenso. They were mistaken, just as Kruger and Steyn were mistaken, not because they had wrongly gauged the sentiments of the Colonial Dutch, but because they had not allowed sufficiently for the time required to overcome the natural scruples already referred to, and to work up emotion to the pitch of action in the minds of a slow and cautious people.

Loyalty of the British colonists.

Of the British colonists, it is enough to say that in loyalty and patriotic spirit they stood no whit behind their fellow-citizens in other parts of the Empire. There were no doubt individuals in preponderantly Dutch districts who sought to keep in good odour with their neighbours by "sitting on the fence," just as there were others in the towns who looked upon the war simply as an opportunity for making money. But they were the exception. As a rule, the loyalists, where they were an isolated minority, stood

* Even Cape Town itself was not considered safe. Admiral Harris continually kept 500 men in readiness to be landed on the Cape Flats in order to oppose a possible raid by a rebel force. On New Year's Eve sentries were doubled, and special precautions taken owing to rumours of a plot to kidnap the High Commissioner, the success of which was to be the signal for a general rising.

up gallantly for their flag, preferring social ostracism and, in invaded districts, expulsion, the commandeering of their stock and destruction of their property, to any compromise with rebellion. Conspicuous among these scattered loyalists were the employees of the Government railways and of the postal department, alike for their steadfastness and for the invaluable assistance they were able to give to the military intelligence. Where the loyalists were together, as in the towns and in the Eastern Province, they subscribed eagerly to every patriotic fund and welcomed the British troops with the most genuine enthusiasm. Nor were they any less ready to come forward and in their own persons fight for the cause of Imperial unity than the citizens of any other part of the Empire. But there were, at the outset, several serious obstacles to really effective action in this direction.

Mr. Schreiner's position.

The first of these was the character of the Government in power. Mention has already been made of Mr. Schreiner's efforts to dissuade the Dutch population from rebellion. But at the time, in the eyes of the loyalist population at least, the most prominent feature of the Prime Minister's conduct was his reluctance to sanction any effective measures for the defence and safeguarding of the colony by its own loyal population. The truth is that Mr. Schreiner's position was one of extreme difficulty. He had been returned to office as the avowed opponent of the policy of Mr. Chamberlain, Sir A. Milner, and the British party in South Africa, and as the chosen representative of men whose sympathies were wholly with the enemy, men who might at any moment translate those sympathies into overt action. At the same time his own view of the situation was very far from coinciding with that of the bulk of the party whose official leader he was. Not himself a Dutchman, he could never let racial prejudice wholly obscure in his mind the fact, which the course of the negotiations had brought home to him,* that the Transvaal had deliberately thrown away opportunity after opportunity for a peaceful settlement. Moreover, however opposed to the policy of the Imperial

* See vol. i., ch. xi.

Government, nothing was further from his mind than the desire that the Boers should win and expel the British power from South Africa. An intensely patriotic Afrikander, he was also, at bottom, a loyal British citizen and a sincere Imperialist, and the conflict between his political sympathies and prejudices on the one hand, and his high sense of duty on the other, are the best explanation of a policy that at the time seemed tortuous and insincere to both parties. The policy he had sketched out for himself before the war began was, as far as possible, to keep the people of Cape Colony out of the conflict altogether.* But it was a policy which soon showed itself unworkable in practice. To declare Cape Colony neutral, to refuse the use of its ports and railways or the co-operation of its government to the British forces, was advocated by many of the leading men of his party, but Mr. Schreiner clearly saw from the first that such a step would be an act of overt disloyalty, justifying his immediate dismissal by the Governor.

His reluctance to take active measures.

The invasion and annexation of large areas of the Colony, not only in Bechuanaland or Griqualand West, but actually south of the Orange River, in contravention of explicit assurances given to him by President Steyn, created a deep revulsion of feeling in Mr. Schreiner's mind. Nevertheless, just as before the war he had opposed all defensive preparations as likely to provoke the Republics, so even now he was loth to acquiesce in any suggestions for measures to be taken by the Government and people of Cape Colony for the protection of their own territory, lest they should be considered an excuse for rebellion by those whose sympathies were with the enemy. A general enforcement of the Burgher Law, by which every Cape Colonist was liable to serve in defence of the colony, was obviously out of the question. But the raising of defence forces among the loyal colonists might certainly have been more directly encouraged by the Ministry. And in any case Martial Law should have been proclaimed all over the colony from the first, as it was in Natal, in order to make it possible for the military authorities to act freely, to requisition remounts and forage, to collect

* See vol. i., p. 339.

arms and ammunition in the possession of suspects,* and to prevent the communication which constantly went on with the enemy. It was only with the greatest difficulty that Sir A. Milner could persuade Mr. Schreiner to consent to the successive proclamations of Martial Law in districts already invaded, where the mischief was done and the enforcement of Martial Law was mostly a mere phrase.

Milner and Schreiner.

On this question, indeed, as on most others concerned with the carrying on of the war and the defence of the colony, the Prime Minister's action represented the resultant between his own policy and the stronger will and inexorable logic of the Imperial representative. The relations between these two eminent men played no small part in the history of these critical months. It required an infinite patience and forbearance on the part of the Governor to meet and overcome day after day the same scruples and objections to every suggestion for vigorous action, urged by one whose chief and only thought seemed to be for the susceptibilities of the Dutch, when the cutting of the Gordian knot—the precipitating an open breach and calling in a Progressive ministry, pledged to support the war with all their might—might have seemed to offer so much simpler and more effective a solution. Yet hardly less credit is due to the Minister who, contending stubbornly for his own view, still in the end rarely refused to recognize facts or face the consequences of an argument, and who carried on from a sense of duty a policy which was not his own, and still less that of his party, rather than provoke a constitutional crisis which he believed carried with it the risk of general civil war and of infinite disaster to the country he loved. Only the high regard each felt for the ability and sincerity of the other made possible the relation between them, a relation which steadily improved, and eventually came to an end in the middle of 1900 only by the revolt of Mr. Schreiner's party against his leadership.

Schreiner and the Bond.

For each step that brought Mr. Schreiner in line with the Governor separated him further from the bulk of his political

* The stores of arms, however, in the magistrates' offices, such at least as had not already been seized by rebels, were quietly removed to Cape Town in January.

associates. Between him and the Dutch colonists, in whose interests he worked, there stood the ring of the professional Bond politicians and party organizers controlled by that invisible caucus of three, known as the *Commissie van Toezicht*, whose master was Mr. Hofmeyr. Their indignation with Mr. Schreiner's policy, though it never manifested itself in loud denunciations of treason or in the ill-mannered hustling that on one occasion during these days fell to Mr. Schreiner's lot from a loyalist crowd, was intense and steadily growing in its intensity. They had not put him in power to co-operate with Sir A. Milner in furthering British interests, but to thwart his policy, and by so thwarting to further the Afrikander cause. They looked to him for organized obstruction, ending preferably in the dismissal of the Ministry, and in a fierce agitation, well supported by the Opposition in England, against the Governor's "unconstitutional" action. Where agitation might end and open rebellion begin was a question the more discreet among them took care not to ask themselves. But there were undoubtedly many who, elated by the Boer victories, wished for rebellion and nothing else, convinced that rebellion on top of defeat would inevitably lead to a repetition of the surrender of 1881. The views of the extreme party were urged with persistence and skill in the principal Bond newspaper, *Ons Land*, which, in the absence of Martial Law, circulated freely through the colony. Day by day this organ preached or condoned rebellion in barely veiled language, giving point to its suggestions by exaggerated reports of Boer successes and innuendoes as to the trustworthiness of British official reports, and not least by starting that campaign of slander on the subject of "British atrocities" that was destined to play so large a part in the history of the war. For the present, however, hard though the extremists worked for rebellion, they were to some extent prevented from openly attacking Mr. Schreiner by the more responsible men like Mr. Hofmeyr, who still hoped that secret pressure or some act of impatience on the Governor's part would bring the Prime Minister back to a more satisfactory course.

Absence of organization.

Nor was the political difficulty the only obstacle to the organization of Cape Colony for its own defence. The same lack of organization for war, the same belief that national defence was mainly for the regular army, had prevailed in Cape Colony as in every other part of the Empire. Nor were the British War Office and the Regular officer any more inclined to believe in the military value of such voluntary forces as already existed in South Africa, or might be raised for the emergency, than they were to believe in the value of volunteers from England or from any of the other colonies. In Cape Colony, as elsewhere, the utilization of local patriotism was not a matter to which the military authorities bent their whole energies, but an experiment doubtfully and half reluctantly sanctioned, and hedged round with every possible regulation and restriction.* As a matter of fact, owing to the frequent native wars, South Africa contained a larger proportion of men accustomed to fighting than any other part of the Empire. Most of these old campaigners had fought side by side with Boers, and regarded themselves as the superiors of the Boers at their own game. Their contempt for the tactics of British regulars and their unwillingness to serve under British officers in the early stages of the war were hardly less than the disbelief of the regulars in them and, perhaps, equally unjustified. With this attitude on both sides, the surprise is not that no more was done, but that local patriotism, in spite of obstacles and discouragements, yet managed to effect so much.

The Colonial Volunteer corps.

The permanent forces of Cape Colony at the outbreak of war consisted of the Cape Police and the Cape Mounted Rifles, about 800 and 900 strong respectively. United, these would have formed the nucleus of a very effective mounted division. Unfortunately, in pursuance of Mr. Schreiner's policy, the greater part of them were scattered all over the Colony. The only compact portion, some 450 of the Cape Mounted Rifles, were with General Gatacre on the eastern

* Typical of the official attitude is the fact that when the Cape volunteer corps were called out, the War Office would only sanction the rates of pay locally settled, on the understanding that the volunteers should be dismissed on the arrival of the Army Corps, an absurd stipulation which, needless to say was never observed.

flank.* Volunteer corps, mostly infantry and artillery, existed in the larger towns, and there were small mounted rifle associations in the Kaffir districts of the Eastern Province. Their total strength was over 5,000, and, in spite of considerable depletion through recruiting into the specially raised corps, showed a steady increase during the critical months of the war.† As regards training, they stood very much on a level with the Volunteers in this country. They were called out by proclamation on October 16, 1899.‡ If they had been sent there and then to hold the line of the Orange River, or even to strengthen De Aar, Naauwpoort, and Stormberg, their mere presence, quite apart from their fighting value, might have effectively checked the Boer invasion and prevented the spread of rebellion. But in accordance with Mr. Schreiner's policy they were at first, to their great disgust, called out simply to defend their own towns, mostly on the sea coast and many hundred miles from the front. Before long, however, some of them were moved up to hold points on the line of communications, where they played a very useful, if inconspicuous, part. After the reverses in December the patriotism of the citizens of Grahamstown, followed by other main centres of the Colony, suggested the formation of town guards for local defence, setting the organized volunteer corps wholly free for more important work, not least of which was the task of helping to close the dangerous gap in the centre of Cape Colony between French and Gatacre by occupying Rosmead Junction, Cradock, Tarkastad, and other points.

The specially-raised corps.

But the forces with which Cape Colony will always be particularly associated in the history of the South African War are the various irregular corps raised in the Colony, composed in part of Cape colonists, and in part—in some cases mainly—of Johannesburg refugees, Englishmen, Canadians, New Zealanders, Americans, in fact of fighting spirits from every part of the world. Originally the Imperial Light Horse was to have been raised in Cape Town, but meeting

* See vol. ii., p. 362.

† About 5,600 by December, 1899.

‡ The Kimberley corps were called out on October 4, while some of the rifle associations in the Eastern Province were not called out till some weeks later.

with no encouragement from Sir W. Butler, its organizers had betaken themselves to Natal. The prowess of the corps at Elandslaagte stirred up a spirit of emulation in Cape Colony, and at the same time modified the views of the military. Within a week of his arrival, Sir R. Buller sanctioned the raising of a mounted corps called the South African Light Horse, and detailed Lieutenant-Colonel C. àCourt of his staff * to supervise the organization of this and other corps that might be formed. The quality of this first corps, composed mainly of South Africans, † but with a free sprinkling of other colonials, Texan cowboys and British yeomen, was excellent. The first recruit was passed on November 8, and on December 15 three squadrons stood their baptism of fire at Colenso, and faced heavy losses with admirable spirit. In all, eight squadrons of about 100 men were raised. About the same time Colonel E. Y. Brabant, M.L.A., an experienced veteran of the Kaffir wars, was allowed to raise a regiment among the English farmers of the Eastern Province. When the crisis came, a second regiment of South African Light Horse, ‡ followed soon after by a third,§ and a second regiment of Brabant's Horse were formed, the latter no longer purely composed of Cape farmers, but, like the corps raised at Cape Town, containing volunteers who had hurried to South Africa from every part of the Empire. Two other corps, each some 400–450 strong, were raised among the Eastern Province farmers by Colonel Bayly and Colonel Nesbitt, both veteran South African campaigners, while a corps of some 300 was raised at the end of January by Mr. Orpen in the Hopetown district in the north-west of the colony. But the dislike of being tied to regular troops and of being split up and losing their local identity was a

* Shortly afterwards succeeded by Lieut.-Colonel J. Adye.

† Including not a few loyal Afrikanders. The Stellenbosch Mounted Infantry, which had not been called out because the district was regarded as disloyal in sentiment, joined it *en masse*. Both this corps, and still more the next two regiments raised at Cape Town, absorbed many of the best men in the Cape Volunteer infantry battalions, the Duke of Edinburgh's Own Volunteers, and the Cape Town Highlanders.

‡ First called Warren's Light Horse, and then, when Sir C. Warren went to Natal, Roberts's Horse.

§ Kitchener's Horse.

considerable obstacle to recruiting, and it was not till Lord Roberts on his arrival sanctioned the idea, which had been actively canvassed for some weeks, of an independent colonial division under Colonel Brabant, that real activity was infused into the movement for ridding Cape Colony of its invaders.

The Railway Pioneer Regiment.

There was one corps raised during this period which is deserving of special mention. The idea of utilizing the engineering skill of many of the Uitlander refugees in the formation of a special corps of Railway Pioneers was put forward by Mr. L. I. Seymour, the distinguished American engineer, and after several weeks spent in overcoming official inertia, during which many of the best recruits went home to England, was carried into execution in the middle of December. The Railway Pioneer Regiment, whose strength eventually rose to four battalions, proved of incalculable value, and the success of Lord Roberts's advance to Pretoria largely depended upon its exertions. All in all, including the defenders of Kimberley and Mafeking, Cape Colony furnished, during the first eight months of the war, something like 20,000 men towards its defence, by no means a contemptible figure in view of the considerations which have been detailed in the preceding pages.*

Attitude of the coloured population.

So far mention has only been made of the white population of Cape Colony. But the native and coloured population, which considerably outnumbered the white and included not only the tribal Kaffirs of the Eastern Province, but the half-caste cultivators and shopkeepers of the west, and the Malay traders and professional men of Cape Town and Kimberley, was a not unimportant factor. Its general attitude may be summed up as one of genuine loyalty, to some extent qualified, during these critical weeks, by doubt as to the actual issue, but demonstrated with exuberant glee when the tide of success once began to run in favour of the British arms. Declarations of loyalty and readiness to serve in any capacity were made soon after the outbreak of war

* In a purely loyalist farming region such as British Kaffraria it was reckoned that nearly half of the adult male British population took the field.

both by the Mohammedan community of Cape Town and by the "coloured," *i.e.* half-caste, community of the south-western colony. It would have been easy, if the policy of the British Government had not been to keep the war, as far as possible, a white man's war, to have raised several corps among the "Cape Boys," whose good fighting quality had been shown in the old Kaffir wars, and more recently in the Matabele rebellion. As it was, the "Cape Boys" were confined to playing their part, a very important part no doubt, with the transport department, for which they supplied the bulk of the drivers and attendants.

The levies in the native territories.

But though it was possible to keep the coloured and native population outside of the struggle in regions where they lived mixed up with the whites and occupied a definitely inferior social position, the problem was more difficult when it came to the native reserves in Eastern Cape Colony, which were wholly peopled with Kaffirs still largely in the tribal state. It was in the last degree improbable that the Boer commandos would of their own accord refrain from invading these fertile regions, or from freely commandeering the possessions of the natives. The tribes, on the other hand, many of whom had been carrying on war against the British barely twenty years before, were not likely to take such an invasion quietly. There was thus a serious danger of a general agitation and rising of the natives which would either, if successful, involve grave risks for the future peace of South Africa, or, if unsuccessful, convince the native mind that the British Empire was unable to protect its peaceful subjects. The only safe remedy was to keep the Boers from the temptation of entering the native districts by making it plain to them that they would have to encounter serious resistance. Accordingly, on the advice and under the general direction of Sir Henry Elliot, K.C.M.G., administrator of the native districts, native levies were organized during December under the magistrates of the different districts, and camped near the frontier. These levies, officered by white officers, and stiffened by small detachments of Cape Mounted Rifles and white volunteers, amounted eventually to over 4,000 men divided into two main bodies, the Griqua-

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR E. Y. BRABANT, K.C.B.,
COMMANDING COLONIAL DIVISION.
Photo by S. B, Barnard, Cape Town,

land East and Tembuland field forces. The former, with its headquarters at Mount Fletcher, was commanded by Mr. Walter Stanford, and consisted of about 200 Cape Mounted Rifles and white volunteers, and 2,000 Fingos. The latter, which from the military point of view was the more important, was directly under Sir H. Elliot, who kept his main body of 180 white volunteers, 500 Fingos, and 600 Tembus at Engcobo, another 500 between Cala and Indwe, and advanced detachments at points nearer the Wodehouse and Barkly East borders. The measure, in which Mr. Schreiner only acquiesced with the utmost reluctance, proved a remarkable success. The raising of the levies at once quieted the agitation and restlessness which were already showing themselves among the natives.* The Boers took the hint and henceforward treated the border of the native districts as respectfully as that of a neutral state. Even the Dutch colonists on the northern fringe of these districts made no attempt to leave them in order to join the invaders. The conduct of the levies was such that even the disloyalists, who began with a great outcry about the imminent massacre of Afrikander women and children by savage hordes in British pay, failed to find in it any material for their "atrocities" campaign. This result was a signal testimony not only to Sir H. Elliot's ability and influence with the natives, but also to the character of the colonial native administration in the past.

Part played by Sir A. Milner.

No review of the work done during these critical weeks to keep the invasion of Cape Colony within bounds, to check the spread of rebellion, and to preserve the scattered portions of the field army intact till Lord Roberts's arrival, would be true that failed to lay stress on the importance of the part played throughout by Sir A. Milner. Rarely has a British statesman borne so heavy a burden of work, responsibility, and anxiety as Sir A. Milner bore through these early months of the war. His strength of will, courage, and confidence alone carried him successfully through an ordeal which would have broken a weaker man. Not only had he

* Especially in the form of cattle-raiding from the Dutch farmers of adjoining districts.

to deal with a political situation of exceptional difficulty, but the absence of Sir Redvers Buller in Natal and the necessity of organizing Cape Colony for its own defence made his counsel and co-operation an essential factor of the military situation. It is no detraction from the good work done by General Forestier-Walker and by his staff during the military *interregnum* in Cape Colony to admit the greatness of the debt they owed to the energy and resourcefulness, the local knowledge and personal influence of the High Commissioner, and to the co-operation of his Military Secretary, Major Hanbury-Williams.

Attitude of Natal. The Volunteer corps.

Very different was the condition of affairs in Natal. Though the northern districts of the "garden colony" were largely inhabited by Boer farmers, not a few of whom actively helped the invaders, yet as a political unit Natal may be said to have been unanimous in its desire to render loyal support to the Imperial cause, and to do its share towards the defence of its own territory. Political controversy was in abeyance; indeed, the only political event of importance during this period was the sudden death, in the closing days of the year, of the Right Hon. Harry Escombe, formerly Prime Minister of the colony, to whose unceasing activity Natal owed the development of Durban as one of the principal ports for the Transvaal. The different volunteer corps, originally raised in the days when the Zulu power was a constant menace, and containing a good sprinkling of men with military experience, had been strengthened by the outbreak of war to over 2,000 men, of whom fully two-thirds were mounted. They at once took their place in the fighting line, and more than half of them were besieged with Sir G. White in Ladysmith before the war was three weeks old.

Inadequacy of emergency measures. Uitlander corps.

When the Boers came south of the Tugela the Natalians, deprived of the flower of their own forces and without an adequate force of Imperial troops to protect them, were naturally much alarmed. Nevertheless, Colonel Hime's Government could not bring themselves to call out and order to the front the voluntary rifle associations in the different districts, and contented themselves with expressing the hope that the

members of the associations would join Murray's Horse, a hastily levied corps commanded by the ex-Colonial Secretary, the Hon. T. K. Murray,* which patrolled the country round Mooi River from November 2 to November 16, and was then disbanded on the arrival of regular troops. The total strength of the corps was under 150 men, an indication of the futility of relying upon the individual patriotism of even the most sincerely patriotic population, where personal service is not recognized as a national duty.† After Sir R. Buller's arrival in Natal a force called the Colonial Scouts was raised which eventually numbered nearly 800 men. This corps was the only one composed, like the corps raised in Cape Colony, of Uitlanders and volunteers from every part of the Empire mixed up with Natal colonists. The other corps raised in Natal, namely, the Imperial Light Horse, Thorneycroft's and Bethune's Mounted Infantry, the Imperial Light Infantry, and the corps of stretcher-bearers, amounting in all to over 4,000 men, were entirely distinct from the corps belonging to the colony and were mainly composed of Transvaal Uitlanders. Excluding these, Natal put into the field in the early months of the war some 3,500 men, that is to say, something like 20 per cent. of her adult male white population, or about eight times as large a proportion as was furnished by the United Kingdom.

The Zululand border.

The colony might very probably have done even more after Colenso had it been more directly threatened with invasion or the spread of rebellion. But Buller's army, though checked, was quite strong enough to bar any further advance. The left flank of Natal was covered by Basutoland and the Drakensberg. The only possibility of danger lay in Boer raids from the Zululand side, either through Helpmakaar and Greytown, or further east through Melmoth and Eshowe. It was with the comparatively light task of protecting this flank and Buller's communications in rear that the Natal Government was mainly occupied. The

* Afterwards Sir T. K. Murray, K.C.M.G.

† The lesson was taken to heart by Natal, and after the end of the war a system of universal liability to service was introduced by the Natal Militia Act, 1903.

Umvoti Mounted Rifles held the Tugela in front of Greytown, with the Colonial Scouts disposed near Weenen, between them and Buller's force, and along the railway from Estcourt to Nottingham Road. Two more squadrons of the Colonial Scouts, together with some 50 men of the 60th Rifles, a troop of Natal Police, and some 300 *Nongquais*, or Zulu policemen, in all some 730 men, formed the Melmoth field force, which from the beginning of January onwards guarded the Zulu border and kept the natives quiet, thus playing much the same part as that played by the native levies in Eastern Cape Colony.

Loyalty of Natal Indians.

Mention should lastly be made of the patriotic action of the Indian community of Natal. In a colony where the Indian indentured coolie is regarded as a necessary evil, and the Indian trader as an unmitigated nuisance, there seemed no special reason for the Indian community to be demonstratively exuberant in its patriotism. Some of the more far-seeing Indians, however, including Mr. Gandhi, a lawyer whose persistent advocacy of Indian interests had brought him no little unpopularity, saw that now was an opportunity for justifying their demands for privilege by giving an example of patriotic duty. About a hundred of the leading Indians of Durban met towards the end of October and offered their services to the Government as unpaid ambulance assistants. The offer was eventually accepted and a volunteer ambulance corps, nearly 1,000 strong, was formed, which arrived at the front in time to help with the wounded of Colenso, and proved itself of great use after Spion Kop. In addition to this the Indian community undertook to look after all the Indian refugees from the Transvaal, and collected subscriptions and presents for the sick and wounded.

Rhodesia.

The youngest of the British colonies, Rhodesia, threw itself into the war with a patriotism equal to that of any of its older compeers, and in war, as in peace, fulfilled the task assigned to it by its founder of completing the ring-fence round the Transvaal. Apart from the two Protectorate regiments recruited before the war, in which many Rhodesians enlisted, and the British South Africa Police, volunteer corps were formed and took the field with Colonel Plumer

or helped to guard the drifts over the Limpopo. In all Rhodesia sent to the front 1,500 men out of her little population of 12,000 souls, a higher proportion than that of any other colony. Most of these were already at the front when the crisis came. It was the lack of any further reserve to resist invasion, should the Boers, as it was suggested, decide to trek bodily northwards, that induced the Chartered Company to propose to the Imperial Government on December 6, 1899, to raise a force of 5,000 irregulars to defend Rhodesia and to assist in the main operations, a proposal whose sequel must be left to a later volume. Some anxiety was felt at first as to the attitude of the considerable Boer colony in Mashonaland. But contented with their position, much favoured by Mr. Rhodes in the past, the Dutch Rhodesians remained tranquil, and in April, when the issue of the war seemed no longer in doubt, expressed their loyalty and satisfaction with their government in a document signed by all the leading members of their community. The natives had too recently felt the heavy hand of the white man to wish to rise again, more especially as such grievances as they could fairly urge before 1896 had since been remedied. The general attitude of the more or less self-governing native tribes—Basutos, Bechuanas and Zulus—towards the war has already been referred to.* The period of reverses was not long enough to allow their instinctive inclination to side with the winning party to overcome their natural preference for the British, though in a few instances chiefs may have thought they were playing for safety by keeping in touch with Boer agents.

German South-West Africa and Walfisch Bay.

Adjoining the area of disturbance were the South African possessions of Germany and Portugal, whose position at this time is worth glancing at before we resume the thread of the military operations. Whatever the feeling of Germans at home, the local administration in German South-West Africa was by no means anxious to exchange its present neighbour, the British Government, for an aggressive Afrikander republic. It was not merely in perfunctory compliance, therefore, with orders from Berlin that the drifts on

* Vol. ii., pp. 131–140.

the Orange River were patrolled to prevent German territory being used as a refuge or jumping-off ground by rebels from Western Cape Colony. A more serious problem was presented by the existence of a considerable population of roving Boers in the interior of the colony. When towards the end of January a rumour reached the German authorities that a commando of these Boers had collected with the intention of seizing Walfisch Bay, they were somewhat at a loss how to deal with it with the small forces available, and requested the British to make their own arrangements for the protection of the place. A detachment from H.M.S. *Niobe*, together with some of the Duke of Edinburgh's Rifles from Cape Town, were landed at Walfisch Bay, and spent some dull weeks waiting. Meanwhile the commando, it is said, coming across great abundance of game on their way, spent their ammunition, gave up all idea of military operations, and were never heard of again.

Lorenzo Marques and Portuguese neutrality.

Far more important was the position of the Portuguese colony of Mozambique, whose port of Delagoa Bay provided the only gateway between the Transvaal and the outer world. It was through Delagoa Bay that the Transvaal received such supplies as still passed through, as well as its reinforcements of foreign volunteers, and maintained its communication with its agents abroad. Well disposed as was the Portuguese Government, the local administration and the resident community of Lorenzo Marques were too dependent on the Transvaal trade and too closely associated with the policy of President Kruger, who after all created the port, not to be favourably inclined to the Boers, and not to resent any restrictions upon their opportunities for making money, which the duty of neutrality imposed upon them.* When even British firms at the port found the temptation of doing good business too strong for their patriotism it was difficult to expect much from merchants of other nationalities or from the Portuguese officials, and there can be no doubt that,

* A factor of some importance in determining the general attitude of the port was the great local influence of Mr. Pott, who combined the position of leading shipping agent with the functions of consul for the Transvaal and for the Netherlands.

during the earlier part of the war, the neutrality of Lorenzo Marques was, in some respects, distinctly benevolent towards the Transvaal. For a while, in fact, Lorenzo Marques possessed for the Boers all the advantages of a seaport without any of the risk of blockade or capture by the Power which had command of the sea. Gradually, however, the representations of the British authorities had their effect. The passage of intending combatants, indeed, was not materially interfered with, but only turned into a source of revenue by the elaborate passport system devised by the Portuguese. But some check was put on the passage of goods obviously intended for military purposes. Far more effective than the Portuguese measures were the close watch kept on the port by a small British squadron in the offing, which soon convinced firms in Europe that the shipping of contraband would not pay, and the secret buying up by the British authorities of non-military supplies as fast as they were landed.

Suggested violation of Portuguese neutrality discussed.

It has often been asked whether the British Government would not have done well deliberately to have violated Portuguese neutrality, and either actually blockaded Delagoa Bay, as Sir R. Buller repeatedly suggested, or even occupied Lorenzo Marques and used it as a base of operations against the Transvaal. But there is no sufficient reason for quarrelling with their decision to abstain from such a course. Apart from any question of political morality and of the old ties of friendship and alliance which connect England and Portugal, the international situation was not one in which England could afford to increase her general unpopularity. Nor were the military advantages to be gained at all commensurate with the political and moral drawbacks. A blockade could have achieved very little more than was already secured by a vigorous exercise of the right of search. As for the plan of invading the Transvaal from the east its merits were mainly imaginary. To have taken British troops in the middle of the South African summer through the fever-stricken Portuguese and Transvaal lowlands, in order to set them at the mighty mountain ramparts of the Drakensberg, would have been a very doubtful enterprise, which there was no overpowering strategical necessity to

justify, and for which troops could ill have been spared from other parts of the theatre of war.*

* The right of military passage and control over the territory between Delagoa Bay and the Transvaal was secured by the Anglo-Portuguese Convention framed by Sir R. Morier, and signed by him in May, 1879, but never ratified owing to the carelessness of the British Government. The existence of that right would no doubt have facilitated various measures for safeguarding British interests and justified minor military operations, as distinct from an invasion on a large scale. Some such understanding did exist with regard to the territory of the Mozambique Company lying between Rhodesia and the sea, and will be referred to again in connexion with the Beira expedition.

CHAPTER VI

OPERATIONS IN CAPE COLONY UP TO LORD ROBERTS'S ARRIVAL

State of the British forces.

We must now once more pick up the threads of the military operations at the point where we left them in the closing chapters of the last volume. The series of disconnected advances which ended at Stormberg, Magersfontein, and Colenso had left the force originally destined for the march to Pretoria scattered along a front of 500 miles, nowhere strong enough for an effective advance, nowhere able to withdraw for the purpose of concentrating without leaving a serious gap. Had the Boers taken advantage of the moral effect of their victories and of their possession of interior lines in order to direct a concentrated attack on any one of the scattered British forces, or to fall upon their communications, the situation would have become serious in the extreme. Fortunately, they knew nothing either of scientific strategy or of vigorous offensive action, and the defeated British army was everywhere left in possession of the strategic initiative. But for the moment the British on their side felt no desire to resume the offensive. It was not so much the case that they were disheartened by their losses—though it cannot be denied that an undue importance was attached to these, not only by a public ignorant of the meaning of war, but even by soldiers whose judgment was warped by the trifling casualties of savage warfare—as that the leaders had lost that confidence in the tactical value of their troops which is the foundation of all bold strategy. The effects of modern rifle-fire, as shown in the last few battles, had produced a state of bewilderment from which the army required a little time to recover. All that was

necessary was that it should hold its own for a few weeks. Reinforcements were arriving daily, the new Commander-in-Chief would speedily follow, and then the relief of the beleaguered garrisons and the march to the Boer capitals would be resumed with a new spirit and with certain success.

Buller's decision after Stormberg. War Office interference.

But we must first revert to certain important decisions taken by Sir Redvers Buller, during the critical week that preceded Lord Roberts's appointment, which were destined to have a far-reaching influence on the whole course of the war. On receipt of the news of the reverse at Stormberg, Buller sent orders to Cape Town that the first brigade of the 5th Division to arrive should be despatched to support Gatacre, while Sir C. Warren should go up from Port Elizabeth to Naauwpoort with the remaining brigade to take his allotted place in the intended general concentration for the passage of the Orange River. These were the first orders Warren received when he landed on December 13. Warren had, with Buller's approval, been given the "dormant commission" to succeed to the chief command in South Africa in case of the latter's disablement or death. Having himself forsaken his central directing position for one at the front, Buller was particularly anxious that his possible successor should not place himself in the same awkward predicament, and sent special injunctions to Cape Town that Warren was on no account to go to the front north of Orange River Station. Great then was Buller's annoyance when, without previous consultation or warning, he received a telegram from Lord Lansdowne on the 14th announcing that Lord Wolseley had ordered Warren to proceed to Modder River at once to take over the command of Lord Methuen's force, and recommending that Methuen should be employed on the lines of communication. He immediately ordered Warren to stay where he was, and on the 16th sent a strong protest to Lord Lansdowne against this interference with his discretion, an interference as unjustifiable as, it must be admitted, it was exceptional.*

Buller's own plan of action with regard to Methuen was,

* See Evidence, War Commission, 15314–15328 and 21259–21262.

at that moment, quite different. His first thought on getting the news of Magersfontein on the 12th was not that Methuen was unfit to command, but that Methuen's reverse threatened once more to frustrate or at least defer the execution of the original plan of campaign, which he was hoping to resume in a few days' time, as soon as he should have extricated White from Ladysmith. To have to relieve another Ladysmith on the Modder River was by no means to his liking. Accordingly he telegraphed to Methuen that unless he felt strong enough to make another attack immediately he was to fall back on Orange River. The message was received with dismay at the headquarters by the Modder (December 13). But reluctant as Methuen was to abandon the ground he had gained by his first three battles, and confident as he was of holding his own with a force of 12,000 men and 30 guns in open country, he was not prepared, without breathing space or further reinforcements, to set his defeated troops a second time to the task of turning Cronje out of his intrenchments. He put the alternative to his brigadiers, but, except Pole-Carew,* they all voted for retirement. Regretfully Methuen made his preparations for retreat on the morrow.

Buller orders Methuen to retreat. Dec. 13.

But by the morrow other considerations came into play. Buller's order had created no less dismay at Cape Town, where General Forestier-Walker, commanding the lines of communication, and Colonel Wynne, Buller's acting chief of the staff, superintended all arrangements in close consultation with the High Commissioner. Not that the imperative objections to allowing Methuen to be cut off and invested at Modder River were not fully understood at Cape Town, but it was felt that if Methuen could continue to hold his own at Modder River, without in any way sacrificing the quality of his force as a mobile field force, or running serious risk of

Methuen allowed to remain. Dec. 14.

* Pole-Carew, who at this meeting only urged that the force should stay where it was, was so impressed with the disastrous effect that would follow the retreat that on leaving the council of war he had a scheme worked out for an immediate advance by Jacobsdal and Brown's Drift, which he laid before Methuen in the middle of the night, without inducing the latter to change his mind, but with the result of delaying the retirement for further consideration of the scheme in the morning.

permanent interruption to his communications, it was preferable to keep him there till the arrival of reinforcements, due in the next few days, rather than run the serious risks, both with regard to the fate of Kimberley and to the possibilities of a rising in the colony generally, involved by a retreat to Orange River. Questions addressed to Methuen on this point elicited such satisfactory assurances that on the 14th Forestier-Walker telegraphed to Buller strongly urging that Methuen should be allowed to remain till reinforced by the 10th Brigade of Warren's division. Buller acquiesced that same afternoon in time to countermand Methuen's retreat, which had fortunately been delayed over the 14th for a further consultation with his brigadiers.

Warren ordered round to Natal. Dec. 18.

The plan now was that Warren should go up to Orange River with the 10th Brigade, which was just arriving, and wait for the 11th to follow to De Aar, whereupon the whole division was to move up to Modder River. Warren, as senior, would then take the command of the whole force, though without displacing Methuen in command of his division, relieve Kimberley, and proceed to advance upon Bloemfontein, accompanying his advance by the construction of a railway from Modder River eastwards by Jacobsdal.* On the 16th Buller ordered Methuen to begin work at once on this railway and to fill up with six weeks' supplies, and that same evening Warren, who had been busy collecting a colonial intelligence staff and making other preparations for operations on a large scale in the Free State, left Cape Town for the front. But next morning, while Warren's train was winding its way across the bleak Karroo, Buller received the Secretary of State's message urging him to make another attempt to relieve Ladysmith † and suggesting that he might make use of the reinforcements now arriving. He decided to bring the 5th Division round to Natal. Arriving at De Aar on the 18th, Warren received a telegram ordering him back to Cape

* See War Commission Evidence, 14963. Vol. ii., pp. 175, 176. The idea of this railway scheme seems to have been in Warren's mind on the journey, and on landing he consulted Colonel Girouard, who, on the strength of his Sudan experience, declared the scheme possible. It was then communicated to Buller, who took up the idea warmly.

† Vol. ii., p. 464.

Town, and on the 21st he and his division * sailed for Natal. Buller's change of decision was much regretted at the time by Cape Colonists, who remembered the part Warren had played in Griqualand in 1878 and in Bechuanaland in 1885, and it must have been a keen disappointment for the general himself to exchange the prospect of an independent command on the scene of his former successes for unfamiliar ground and for a subordinate position under a chief whom he scarcely knew.†

Methuen at Modder River.

But though Buller now abandoned the idea of sending the 5th Division up to Modder River, he no longer considered Methuen's position critical enough to necessitate retirement, and replied with confident assurance to the anxious queries of the High Commissioner, ever alive to the danger of a general rising in the colony and to the consequent possibility of Methuen's isolation. On the 26th Lord Roberts endorsed Buller's decision by a telegram from Gibraltar expressing his desire that Methuen should stay at Modder River unless actually forced to retire. And so Methuen stayed on, intrenching himself in his camp, sending out patrols, and generally awaiting developments. Tents were sent up and a standing camp formed. The reconstruction of the high level railway bridge over the river, the laying of railway sidings—including about a mile of the proposed railway to Bloemfontein—and the accumulation of enormous quantities of stores were busily proceeded with so that everything should be ready for an early resumption of the advance on Kimberley. Little active warfare was carried on near the camp itself. But the outworks of the camp were pushed well forward, at one point to within 1,500 yards of the outermost shelter trenches of the enemy, and a regular daily cannonade of the Boer position was carried on, at a range of 6,700 yards, by the naval 4·7 inch gun at the ganger's hut a mile north of the station. The line of communications was steadily strengthened, and

* Excepting two battalions—1st Yorkshire and 2nd Warwickshire—who had already got up to De Aar and were left there in view of the unsettled state of Cape Colony.

† Before sailing Sir C. Warren was offered the alternative by Sir A. Milner of leaving his division in order to organize the defences of Eastern Cape Colony, a proposal which, however, he did not accept.

by the end of the year General Elliott Wood, R.E., who now took over the whole section from De Aar to Honeynest Kloof, had some 11,000 men under his command.* Considering the reluctance of the Boers at that period to attack intrenched posts, a reluctance signally manifested on the occasion of Prinsloo's abortive raid on the line of communications on December 7,† this force was more than sufficient to prevent any permanent interruption of communications.

Advantage of his retention there.

The retention of Lord Methuen's force in front of the Magersfontein trenches was, as things turned out, one of the most fortunate decisions in the whole war. It effectively dispelled all doubt as to the nature of the Magersfontein reverse, making it clear, to friend and foe alike, that the force was not broken but only checked, and ready to resume the offensive whenever the suitable moment should come. The retreat to Orange River would not only have been a difficult operation in itself, but would have left the Boers free to concentrate their forces on Kimberley or on central Cape Colony, where their successful advance—especially if combined with rebellion in the west—would have rendered the position of the force at Orange River quite as insecure as it was at the Modder. Retreat would have almost compelled the Boers to take the initiative. As it was, the camp and the occasional shelling proved an irresistible temptation to them to continue a purely passive defence, a defence, moreover, conducted under most unfavourable conditions. For we must always keep in mind that Cronje's lines at Magersfontein were not, like Wellington's at Torres Vedras, the outcome of a deliberate scheme of strategy. They were the

* The following were the detailed dispositions on December 20: Honeynest Kloof, half Munster Fusiliers; Enslin, two guns "P" Battery, R.H.A., Australian Infantry and M.I. and 1st Gordons; Belmont, four guns "P," R.H.A., and Canadian Regiment; Witteputs, two companies Duke of Cornwall's L.I.; Orange River, 2nd Dragoons, 37th R.F.A. (four guns), 38th R.F.A., two companies M.I., six companies D.C.L.I., 2nd Shropshire L.I., and details; De Aar, 4th R.F.A., 37th (two guns), 2nd Warwicks, 1st Yorkshire, 1st Essex, two companies M.I., and details; Hanover Road, one company M.I. The rest of the enormous line from De Aar down to Cape Town was guarded by small detachments of the Duke of Edinburgh's Volunteer Rifles.

† See vol. ii., p. 388.

result of hasty tactical improvisation by a force which had hurried down from Mafeking just in time to stop Methuen reaching Kimberley. While Methuen, with his railway behind him, was able to supply his men and horses abundantly and to pile up large reserves, the Boers had to create their line of communications after they arrived there. The organization of the wheeled transport required to supply from Bloemfontein the 10,000 burghers on the western border was a very heavy strain on the capacities of the two Republics, and, no doubt, was a contributing cause of the immobility of the Boers at the front during these early months of the war. Even so it was found impossible to bring up forage in any sufficient quantity, with the result that on the sandy Griqualand veld Cronje's horses rapidly lost condition or even died, and that a steadily growing proportion of his force, amounting by February to fully a third, was unmounted—a weakness destined to come to light before long. And not only was the Boer line of communications inadequate in carrying power, but it was also strategically false, running as it did parallel to the Boer position and within easy striking distance of the British force.

Cronje's inactivity

No attempt was made by Cronje to improve the position of his force after Magersfontein. The main line of trenches was considerably strengthened, it is true, but nothing was done to render the exposed left flank of the position at Jacobsdal more secure. Field bakeries, smithies, and all the other apparatus of a standing camp sprang up at the great triangular wagon laager at Brown's Drift, convoys of water-carts plied regularly between the river and the trenches, and in the midst of all this Cronje settled down to wait for the next frontal attack. It was in vain that De la Rey and Christian De Wet—who had arrived after Magersfontein to take up the position of "Fighting General" in command of the Free State commandos with Cronje *—urged him to allow

* At this time the Free State contingents at Magersfontein were quite independent of Cronje, and De Wet's military superior was C. J. Wessels, Free State head commandant on the western border, whose headquarters were at Kimberley. Soon after, by an arrangement between the two governments, Cronje was given command over all the forces at Magersfontein and Wessels over all those at Kimberley, Free Staters and

them to take 1,500 men in order to make an attempt on Methuen's communications south of the Orange River; he was determined to keep the whole of his 8,000 men under his hand. A scheme for catching a supply train and blowing up the railway immediately behind Methuen was indeed decided on by the end of December, and De la Rey and De Wet, with 700 men and two guns, passed through Jacobsdal on January 4 to carry it out by a night attack. The guns lost their way; the bulk of the commando, disliking the task, slipped away on the road; the rest arrived just too late for the train; finally, the attempt to wreck the permanent way was frustrated by the precipitate flight of the burghers who carried the dynamite. The expedition ended in mutual recriminations and a stronger disinclination than ever for such adventurous exploits. Failing an effort to invest or dislodge Methuen, it might have been possible to deceive him as to the strength of the Boers at Magersfontein and to have made a determined attempt to get into Kimberley or to deal more effectively with French or Gatacre. But though De la Rey was sent with a few hundred men to Colesberg on the 7th, this was done not so much in pursuance of any definite plan of concentration as in order to prevent the town being recaptured by the British, in other words, in pursuance of the general policy of passive defence. The only operation on the western frontier in which the Boers took the initiative during this period was one of absolutely no strategical significance.

Siege of Kuruman.

The little settlement of Kuruman lies 120 miles north-west of Kimberley. A mission station, the original nucleus of the place, a court-house, a few traders' stores and a native village, constitute the whole of this westernmost outpost of civilization in that sparsely inhabited and almost desert region. For the maintenance of law and order among the scattered farms and native kraals of the district, Kuruman

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Transvaalers alike. On De la Rey's departure De Wet succeeded him as second-in-command of the Transvaalers, and thus became second-in-command of the whole Magersfontein force. On January 11 Wessels's term of office expired, and Commandant J. S. Ferreira was elected as his successor.

is also the headquarters of a detachment of Cape Police. At the outbreak of war this detachment consisted of thirty-five policemen under Captain Bates, who, acting under instructions from Colonel Kekewich at Kimberley, at once proceeded to put the place in a state of defence. The able-bodied white civilians, to the number of thirty-three, were enrolled as special police. Another fifty or sixty Bastards and natives were also called up, but only fourteen of these could be provided with rifles, and the rest were mainly employed in digging, carrying water, etc. A camp was selected on rising ground in the middle of the village and fortified by a chain of small sandbag redoubts built round it and connected by trenches or loopholed stone walls. On November 12 Field-Cornet J. H. Visser arrived with 300–400 Transvaalers and rebels at Phokwane, some seven miles to the east, and demanded the surrender of Kuruman. Captain Bates sent his refusal, hoisted the Union Jack, and manned his trenches for the attack. The attempt to rush the place was easily checked, but heavy firing went on for a whole week, at the end of which Visser abandoned the siege and retired towards Vryburg. Kuruman now enjoyed a fortnight's rest, during which it destroyed the Boer schanzes and strengthened its own earthworks. On December 5 Visser returned, having gradually brought up his force to 1,000–1,200 men, including a Free State contingent under Field-Cornet Wessels. For the next ten days the Boer efforts were concentrated on the redoubts on the eastern side. The schanzes were brought to within five hundred yards. But so good was the shooting of the defenders that even now the Boers lacked the courage to rush the handful of men opposed to them in open daylight. A series of night attacks was begun, but though the Boers got close up to the redoubts and even made hasty shelters within thirty or forty yards of them it was not till the night of the 16th that some sixty or seventy of them succeeded in rushing right up to Brown's redoubt, held by nine men, and pushing the sandbags down on the heads of the defenders. They were beaten back with some loss, but had succeeded in effecting their object in so far as Brown's and Dennison's redoubts, whose loopholes had been rendered

useless, were evacuated and were occupied by the Boers on the following night.

Surrender of Kuruman. Jan. 1.

But though there was only one redoubt left on the eastern side, which protected the approach to the water, the Boers made no really determined effort to capture it, and in spite of a fairly heavy fire kept up every day and most nights they seemed to get no nearer to the reduction of the stubborn little garrison. A curious incident happened on Christmas Day. Wessels proposed an armistice which Bates accepted but which Visser and the Transvaalers refused to recognize. Neither of the Boer commandants would acknowledge the other's authority or yield his point, and eventually matters were settled by the Free Staters going down to the river to bathe and spend the day with the defenders of the entrenchments opposite to them, while the Transvaalers and the rest of the defenders went on fighting. After Christmas the attack revived rather more vigorously, but without making much impression, till January 1. That morning the Boers brought up a 7-pounder cannon and set to work destroying the remaining redoubt on the eastern side. It was not till the ninetieth shell that they succeeded in effectively breaching the redoubt, but the next few shells after that drove out the little garrison, who got into the shallow trenches alongside, where they met with so heavy a converging fire from the riflemen in the Boer schanzes that they hoisted the white flag at 5 P.M. Captain Bates, seeing the whole of his eastern defences carried, the rest cut off from the water, and being nearly at the end of his ammunition, decided to follow suit. Thus Kuruman was surrendered after a very creditable defence by the little garrison, which succeeded in keeping on an average ten times their number of Boers occupied during the most critical weeks of the war. The total British casualties at Kuruman only amounted to three killed and fifteen wounded; the Boer casualties were probably somewhat heavier.

The Sunnyside raid.

While the Boers wasted their time and ammunition against Kuruman they neglected the really fruitful opportunities that lay closer to the theatre of war, and even allowed the British to catch them napping and to inflict a small but yet decided reverse upon them. The organization of rebellion

on the western flank of Methuen's communications was an obvious and necessary step. A strong commando moving about in the triangle between the Orange and Riet rivers would soon have beaten up a large force of recruits. An even better field for such operations was offered by the vast regions across the Orange River. Yet it was not till the end of December that small recruiting parties crossed the Riet and that a camp of some 200 rebels of the Douglas district, under Commandant Scholtz, was collected at Sunnyside farm, some thirty miles north-west of Belmont. Its formation did not escape the notice of the British patrols, and Lieut.-Colonel T. D. Pilcher, who commanded at Belmont, secured permission from General Wood to attack them and, if successful, to reconnoitre as far as Douglas. His force* had been brought up to some 1,600 men by the arrival on December 29 of 250 Queensland M.I. under Colonel Ricardo, and of these he selected 200 Queenslanders, 40 Regular M.I., one company of Canadians, and two guns of "P" Battery, R.H.A., to compose his flying column. General Wood at the same time arranged to send the Greys, under Colonel Alexander, and some mounted infantry from Orange River to Mark's Drift, near the junction of the Orange River and the Vaal, while another mobile column under Colonel Alderson was to march from De Aar to Prieska, some 120 miles, to damp down the incipient rebellion in that district.† From the Modder River camp, meanwhile, General Babington was to march west to prevent the Magersfontein Boers crossing the Riet to interfere with Pilcher's movements.

Pilcher's preparations.

To ensure surprise in a district full of Boer sympathisers was not easy, but by giving out that he was marching to the east of the railway and by actually starting a column in that direction on the 30th, Colonel Pilcher provided that the Boers at Sunnyside should receive reassuring news from their friends a few hours before he hoped to reach them.

* Royal Canadian Regiment, two companies Duke of Cornwall's L.I., 60 Munster Fusiliers M.I., 30 S.E. Company M.I., two guns "P" Battery, R.H.A.

† The danger of rebellion in Prieska had already once been averted, in November, by a surprise visit by a party of Rimington's Guides.

On the afternoon of the 31st he marched his little column eighteen miles to Thornhill farm, asking loyalist farmers on the way to see that none of their natives left the farm that night, and posting some of his Queenslanders to supervise the carrying out of the same measure of precaution where the owners were not above suspicion. To secure the mobility of the whole column, the company of Canadians was conveyed in ten ten-muled buck-wagons, which also carried the supplies and ammunition. The two companies of Cornwalls left Belmont at the same time for Richmond farm, with orders to march to Thornhill next morning as a support.

Sunnyside fight. Jan. 1.

Starting at 6.15 A.M., and moving by a somewhat circuitous route in order to keep under cover of some hills, Pilcher had got within striking distance of the laager by 10 A.M. Major De Rougemont, R.H.A., with the two guns, the Canadians, and the Regular mounted infantry, was sent north-east to engage the enemy, but not to press home the attack. At 11.25 the guns opened on the laager. Many of the Boers bolted precipitately; the rest swarmed on to a kopje in front of the laager and became engaged with the Canadians and mounted infantry. As soon as the firing opened, Pilcher sent the Queenslanders to carry out an enveloping movement on the Boer right flank. An hour later they were in action, and, working skilfully from ridge to ridge, eventually made their way among the loose rocks strewn over the bare kopjes to within fifty yards of the Boer flank. Some more of the Boers escaped before this movement was completed. But the rest were fairly pinned, and after three quarters of an hour's more fighting hoisted the white signal and surrendered. Seven wounded and 31 unwounded prisoners fell into Pilcher's hands, while some 15 or 20 dead Boers were left on the field. The British casualties were only two killed and two wounded.

Pilcher enters Douglas.

The next day Pilcher entered Douglas. The rebels had hastily fled, but the loyal inhabitants welcomed him eagerly, and begged that a detachment should be left behind to hold the village. This was beyond the scope of the expedition, so after sticking up some proclamations and making a demonstration of crossing the Vaal, Pilcher left Douglas at eight next morning, taking with him some 90 loyalist refugees. A

march of 23 miles brought him to Thornhill farm that night. On his way he received a message from Modder River that 600 Boers, who had crossed the Riet at Koedoesberg Drift without any opposition from Babington, were moving against him. Fortunately, however, the sound of his firing across the Vaal in the morning had caused them first to march to Douglas, and it was not till the 4th that they moved in the direction of Thornhill. Pilcher, hearing that they intended to attack at dawn on the 5th, moved off after dark and returned to Belmont. The other columns similarly made their way back to their bases.*

Indirect and moral effects of this success.

Trifling as were the immediate results of Pilcher's expedition, its indirect effects were not unimportant. The rebellion in the Herbert district would, if unchecked, have immediately propagated itself south of the Orange River, and have seriously interfered with Lord Roberts's plans. Sunnyside delayed the southward spread of rebellion by at least a month, and when it broke out the main decision of the campaign was falling, and fresh troops were available for its suppression. The moral effect was even greater. After all the reverses of the last few weeks, a success, however small, which showed that British troops could be handled with skill, and could surprise as well as be surprised, was hailed as a welcome augury for the new year which it opened. And the news that this success was gained by British regulars, Australians, and Canadians, fighting side by side, and each trusted with an equal share in the task, coming at a moment when the voluntary patriotism of every part of the Empire was displaying itself in the raising of emergency forces, was everywhere taken as a sign of the opening of a new era of Imperial co-operation.

Babington's reconnaissance east of the railway. Jan. 8.

Having thus secured his communications from the west, Lord Methuen decided to make an offensive demonstration towards the east, and to interrupt the Boer forage convoys from Fauresmith to Jacobsdal. A force of cavalry † under

* A garrison of 100 New South Wales Mounted Rifles under Captain Antill was, however, left at Prieska by Alderson.

† 9th and 12th Lancers, Victorian Mounted Rifles, and "G" Battery, R.H.A.

General Babington left Honeynest Kloof on January 8, and marched east, very slowly and cautiously, through Ramdam, finding the country wholly deserted. A small mixed force under Major Byron reconnoitred at the same time to within a few miles of Jacobsdal, which it reported held in some strength, while Colonel Pilcher, with his Queenslanders, came out from Belmont and joined Babington, whereupon the whole force returned to the line without achieving any result more tangible than the destruction of Commandant Lubbe's farm.* Though Babington encountered no opposition, there was a small Boer force further south under Commandant Jacobs of Fauresmith engaged in watching the garrison at Orange River. These Boers had recently (December 13) surprised a British patrol near Zoutpan's Drift, twenty miles above Orange River station. But they did not attempt to prevent the establishment by General Wood on January 7 of a strongly fortified post on each side of the drift, which added considerably to the security of the communications, and helped to screen the movements of our troops from observation.

Gatacre at Sterkstroom.

On the eastern as on the western flank of the theatre of war in Cape Colony the Boers showed their incapacity to turn their success to good account, and after Stormberg, as after Magersfontein, it was the British who, without risking operations on a large scale, kept the initiative in their hands. With his main body at Sterkstroom, at the junction of the Dordrecht and Indwe Railway, strong outposts to north and north-east at Bushmanshoek and Penhoek, and a detachment of Cape Police camped in front of Cyphergat so as to overlook the whole open stretch from Molteno to Stormberg, Gatacre was, in spite of his defeat, well placed both for defence and for the resumption of the offensive as soon as reinforcements should reach him. But all the reinforcement Buller eventually decided to spare was an extra field battery,

* General Babington ordered Lubbe's farm to be burnt on the ground that it had been freely used as a rendezvous for Boer scouts. His action, though acquiesced in at the time by Lord Methuen, cannot be regarded as warranted by military exigencies, and elicited a perfectly justifiable protest from the Boer presidents.

the 79th, and a strong battalion, the 1st Derbyshires,* which joined him on the 16th and 17th; and, to enable the latter to come up, the remnant of the unlucky Northumberland Fusiliers, barely 500 men, were sent down to garrison East London. His whole force, including communications, thus amounted to over 6,000 men. Colonel Smith-Dorrien, of the Derbyshires, took over the command of the infantry, and soon had his men hard at work strengthening their positions with intrenchments, and practising attack formations. Active operations were for the present confined to the mounted troops, and more especially to a handful of picked scouts organized by Captain the Hon. R. De Montmorency, V.C., of the 21st Lancers, and inspired by their leader with a spirit of daring and enterprise that made them the terror of Boers and rebels, and served more than anything else in these critical weeks to re-establish British prestige and prevent the spread of rebellion in the Eastern Province.

Temporary occupation of Dordrecht. Dec. 24.

After successful skirmishes along the line of the Indwe Railway on December 21 and 22, De Montmorency on the 23rd, with 50 scouts, followed by another 100 men and an armoured train, engaged some 300 rebels twenty miles out, and, turning them out of position after position, drove them into Dordrecht. Meanwhile Colonel Dalgety, with 240 men of the Cape Mounted Rifles collected from the native territories, now able to look after themselves, had just entered the area of war at Clarke's Siding, seven miles east of Dordrecht. Next morning he occupied Dordrecht, to the discomfiture of the rebels and of the newly arrived Free State landdrost, who beat a hasty retreat before him, but to the great delight of the loyal inhabitants. He was reinforced on the 28th by 100 Cape Mounted Rifles with four 7-pounder guns from Penhoek. But on the 29th Gatacre came to the conclusion that Dordrecht, forty miles from Sterkstroom, was too far out to be permanently tenable, and ordered Dalgety to draw in to Bird's River Siding, seventeen miles nearer and within supporting distance of Penhoek. Before retreating, however, Montmorency with the Dordrecht force successfully engaged some 500 Boers with a

* The 78th and 61st (Howitzer) Batteries also reached Queenstown, but were ordered to Natal after Colenso.

gun at Labuschagne's Nek, north of Dordrecht, on the 30th, renewing the fight before daybreak next morning in order to rescue a party of 35 men who had been left behind in a donga.

Boer attack on Cyphergat. Jan. 3.

On January 3 the Boers moved out from Stormberg 1,000–1,500 strong. Joined by the Dordrecht district commando, they attacked the police camp in front of Cyphergat, at the same time occupying a steep hill called the Looperberg, north of Bushmanshoek, up which they dragged a couple of guns. Their plan apparently was to prevent any attempt to relieve the police camp from Bushmanshoek. However, the 150 police under Inspector Neylan, aided by a company of Kaffrarian Rifles, kept the Boers at arm's length long enough to allow reinforcements to come up from Sterkstroom. These, in conjunction with the mounted infantry and colonials at Bushmanshoek, soon cleared the Boers out of Cyphergat, and a few shells from the 79th Battery, which arrived early in the afternoon, sent them hurrying down the Looperberg and across the hills back to Stormberg. The Boers were fortunate to get off so easily, for if more artillery had come up and the Penhoek force had been ordered to co-operate, many of them might have been cut off on the Looperberg. The hill was subsequently occupied by the Kaffrarian Rifles, with two naval 12-pounders.

The gap in central Cape Colony.

A period of comparative inactivity followed. Gatacre's eastern flank was fairly secure, especially now that Sir H. Elliot's levies closed the native territories to the Boer forces. A wide turning movement against Gatacre's communications was thus out of the question, and in any case these were fairly strongly held, a mixed force mainly composed of colonial volunteer corps being stationed at Queenstown, and other detachments distributed down the line to East London. Gatacre's weak flank was the left. On this side there was nothing between him and the Port Elizabeth line of railway—held by 400 of the Grahamstown First City Volunteers and 500 of Prince Alfred's Volunteer Guards from Port Elizabeth at Cradock, supported by 200 of the Uitenhage Volunteer Rifles at Cookhouse—except a small detachment of volunteers at Tarkastad, thirty-five miles south-west of Sterkstroom. To have attempted to defend this flank was out

of the question, and Gatacre, by demonstrating eastwards and drawing the attention of the Stormberg Boers to that side, probably made the best use of his force. The fact is that the great gap of 180 miles of broken country that separated Sterkstroom from De Aar was one that it was quite impossible to hold defensively with the forces then available in South Africa. There was only one possible way of keeping the Boers from pouring into the heart of Cape Colony, raising rebellion on every side, and compelling the abandonment of the advanced positions at Modder River and Stormberg. That was to demonstrate vigorously against some point which the Boers were anxious to hold, and thereby to concentrate them in its defence and keep them concentrated till reinforcements arrived. How the Boers were shepherded and kept occupied during these anxious weeks the following pages will show.

French's arrival at Naauwpoort. Nov. 20.

The Boer occupation of Colesberg, the evacuation and reoccupation of Naauwpoort, and the arrival of General French at that important junction on November 20 have already been related.* The reoccupation came not a day too soon. The speech-making and other festivities attendant on Schoeman's entry into Colesberg were coming to an end, and his commandos were beginning to clamour for a further advance. Attempts had already been made to wreck the railway line west of Naauwpoort, and at the moment of French's arrival a detachment of the Johannesburg German commando under Field-Cornet Brall pushed through Philipstown and reconnoitred to within sight of De Aar, with its weak garrison and vast accumulation of stores. French's instructions were to secure Naauwpoort, cover the railway communication between De Aar and Port Elizabeth, and, on the arrival of reinforcements, to push forward, reoccupy Colesberg, and generally clear the situation in readiness for the resumption of Buller's advance on Bloemfontein. But he realized at once that even the first part of his task could not be fulfilled by a purely passive defence, and that even with the small force available it was better to tackle the enemy, and keep his attention concentrated at one point, than to attempt to hold so extended a line with inadequate

* Vol. ii., pp. 280, 292.

garrisons. He therefore decided to begin demonstrating actively against Colesberg without delay.

Reconnaissance to Arundel. Nov. 21.

Early next morning French started on a reconnaissance up the railway line towards Colesberg, going as far as Arundel Station, 17 miles from Naauwpoort and equi-distant from Colesberg, without seeing any signs of the enemy. Just beyond Arundel the railway passes through a range of broken kopjes, varying from 50 to 200 feet in height. Two or three prosperous farms with their orchards and plantations nestle picturesquely under the southern slope of the range. On the far side French looked over the open Karroo veld stretching away on the left of the railway for eight miles to the flat-topped hillocks behind Rensburg Station, but narrowed on the right by the line of the Taaiboschlaagte kopjes pushed forward from Rensburg to within six miles of Arundel Nek. Behind these ridges—where a Boer laager was reported—lay another stretch of open plain before the railway plunged into the maze of rock-littered kopjes that formed a rampart in front of Colesberg. North-west and north-east the veld was broken up in every direction by ridges, clusters, and single kopjes of every height and shape. Having once taken in the look of the country, French lost no time in deciding on his plan of campaign. This was to occupy Arundel at once, and using that convenient and easily defensible position as his pivot of operations to work forward among the kopjes on either flank, pushing his patrols well out in every direction, so as to screen his own communications, to check the Boer excursions towards De Aar or Rosmead, and eventually, by threatening the enemy's flanks and lines of communication, to force them to fall back towards the Orange River. In other words, he would try to beat the Boers at their own game.

Unsuccessful attempt to occupy Arundel. Nov. 23.

He communicated his plan to Cape Town that same afternoon, coupling with it a request for two and a half battalions of infantry and some squadrons of cavalry. His own force at the moment, even after the arrival that evening of two companies of the 2nd Mounted Infantry, ordered in from Hanover Road, and "R" Battery, R.H.A., and of the remainder of the Black Watch on the 22nd, amounted to

barely 1,600 men.* Nevertheless, after devoting another day to strengthening the local defences of Naauwpoort, he fully intended occupying the Arundel position on the 23rd. This time, however, French found the Boers in possession. A party about 100 strong were posted on the hill immediately north of the station, supported by a larger force with two guns on some kopjes still farther north. The mounted infantry suddenly came under fire and fell back hurriedly with the loss of a few men, while an attempt on the part of a Boer detachment to outflank the little force was frustrated by the detraining of a handful of cavalry whom French had brought up in his train to do patrol work on arriving. To turn the Boers out of the Arundel positions by direct attack was more than French could as yet undertake. So the next few days were devoted to the strengthening of Naauwpoort and the sending out of patrols in every direction. This policy of caution was fully endorsed by Sir R. Buller, who, on his arrival in Natal, telegraphed to French to "maintain an active defence without running any risks," repeating his injunction a few days later in a message urging a policy of "worry without risk."

Occupation of Rosmead Junction.

The arrival of two squadrons of the 12th Lancers on the 25th and of "O" Battery, R.H.A., on the 27th was balanced by the withdrawal on the 27th of half the Black Watch to Orange River. On the 28th French was informed that the line of communications to Port Elizabeth was put under his orders and that he was to occupy Rosmead Junction. He at once ordered up the colonial volunteers to Cradock, and early next morning despatched two companies of the Berkshires with a squadron of the 12th Lancers to Rosmead with orders to take up a position and patrol the four railway lines that meet there. The move was no sooner taken than Buller countermanded it, and the detachment returned on the 30th, the Lancers passing through Middelburg, where they met with an enthusiastic reception from the loyalist inhabitants and with depressed silence on the part of the

* Viz., half battalion 2nd Berkshires, 2nd Black Watch, 75 New South Wales Lancers and 5th Lancers, 25 Cape Police with two 9-pounder M.L. guns, "R" Battery, R.H.A., and 200 2nd M.I.

disloyalists, who had been on the look-out for a promised Boer commando. The commando was, as a matter of fact, not very far, and the very next day French found himself obliged to send 150 mounted infantry to Rosmead, who arrived just in time to frustrate the attempt of a party of about 100 Boers to seize the junction and destroy the Tafelberg bridge on the Cradock line. The mounted infantry were replaced by detachments of the 1st Suffolks, who arrived at Naauwpoort on December 1; but by the 5th French was able to replace the Regulars at Rosmead with colonial volunteers, and on the 14th he was finally relieved of the responsibility of looking after the Midland line.

Occupation of Arundel. Dec. 7.

Meanwhile French had not lost sight of his original objective, but had constantly patrolled the line up to Arundel. The rest of the Black Watch and the 12th Lancers went off to join Methuen on the 1st and 2nd, but the arrival of the New Zealand Mounted Rifles, under Major Robin, on the 2nd, and of the Carabiniers on the 5th, brought up French's total strength to over 2,000 men, of whom nearly half were mounted. He was at last ready to carry out his plan, and on the 7th Colonel T. Porter, of the Carabiniers, went forward with the bulk of the mounted troops, occupied Arundel without serious opposition, and, pushing on, established himself in suitable positions west of the railway, three and a half miles north of the station. On the following morning French brought up two companies of the Berkshires by rail and proceeded to a reconnaissance in force of the Rensburg and Taaiboschlaagte kopjes, moving forward his mounted infantry in the centre and working his cavalry round the flanks of the position. The reconnaissance soon disclosed the fact that the kopjes were strongly held by some 2,000 Boers with three or four guns, and information gathered from a prisoner led French to the conclusion that the total strength of Schoeman's force was over 4,000 men. During the next few days Arundel was organized as a standing camp, while Porter's patrols continuously harassed the flanks of the Boer position, inflicting some loss on the enemy in their skirmishes and, what was more important, absorbing his whole attention and preventing him from moving.

The Boers replied by extending their flanks and occupying Vaal Kop, a double-topped hill standing a little in front of their right wing on the Rensburg kopjes, and Kuilfontein farm, some three miles further north-west of this. They were cleared out on the 11th, after a short fight, and Vaal Kop was occupied by a squadron of Carabiniers, under Major F. S. Garratt, and two guns of "R" Battery. Between the 10th and the 14th French's mounted force received an important accession in the shape of the Inniskilling Dragoons and 10th Hussars.

Schoeman takes the offensive.

General Schoeman had now been a whole month at Colesberg. His force, which had numbered nearly 2,000 men at the time of French's arrival, had since then been increased by reinforcements from Pretoria and Johannesburg, by Free State commandos originally stationed on the Basuto border, and by strong detachments of the Bethlehem and Kroonstad burghers from Natal, to a total of over 3,500. He had thus throughout enjoyed a large superiority of strength over General French. This superiority he had not made the slightest attempt to turn to account, but had contented himself with complete inactivity, while French was gradually strengthening his base and communications, and receiving fresh accessions of troops. The occupation of Arundel had roused Schoeman from his torpor sufficiently to induce him to advance his headquarters to the Taaibosch-laagte kopjes, but it was not till the seizure of Vaal Kop that he began to realize that he would have to take more active measures.

Action of Dec. 13. French offers his cavalry to Methuen.

He now decided to make an attempt to get round the right flank of the little force at Arundel, cut it off from its communication with Naauwpoort, and, if possible, capture it. On the night of the 12th strong parties were sent forward to occupy the hills east and south-east of Arundel, and by dawn on the 13th some 1,800 Free Staters and Cape rebels, under Commandants Du Toit, Steyl and Naude, with two guns, began the attack. But the British were not to be caught napping. Porter's dispositions were quickly made. With the Berkshires (three companies) and two 9-pounders in the centre, the New South Wales Lancers and New Zealanders

on their left and the mounted infantry on their right, the Arundel position itself was quite secure against a frontal attack. The rest of his force, six squadrons of cavalry and four guns of "R" Battery, Porter sent out two or three miles to the east to meet the more serious danger of envelopment. The horse gunners soon silenced the Boer artillery, and after some hours of skirmishing the cavalry succeeded, by about 2 P.M., in completely heading off the enemy's southward movement and forcing them to fall back towards their original positions. On the right wing the Boers meanwhile occupied Kuilfontein farm, but were turned out by the fire of the two guns at Vaal Kop. The casualties on both sides were insignificant. Coming, as it did, so close upon Stormberg and Magersfontein, Porter's successful cavalry action had a moral value quite apart from its immediate result in safeguarding the position at Arundel from further attack. French fully realized this, and at the risk of abandoning his own plans, offered on the 15th to send the whole of his cavalry round to Modder River to enable Methuen to retrieve his position. The offer, arriving while Warren's division was still under orders for Modder River, was declined, and, in view of the success of French's own operations and Cronje's inactivity, was not reconsidered afterwards.

Evacuation of Vaal Kop. Dec. 16.

On the 16th Commandant Haverman began shelling Vaal Kop from the Rensburg kopjes while Field-Cornet P. de Wet brought round a gun and a pom-pom and began playing upon the reverse of the kopje from the north-west. At the same time the burghers began cautiously advancing to the attack. French, who attached great importance to the maintenance of Vaal Kop, had reinforced the post after a personal reconnaissance on the previous day, and its garrison now consisted of a company of mounted infantry, a squadron of 10th Hussars, and two guns "R" Battery, the whole under Colonel Tudway, commanding the 2nd Mounted Infantry. But the cross-fire on the exposed slopes of the kopje proved very trying, and, without waiting to consult French, Tudway decided to evacuate the position, a movement executed with most disorderly precipitation by some of the troops.

This incident impressed French with the necessity of

keeping in closer touch with the outpost line, and on the 17th he moved up his own headquarters to Arundel, at the same time rearranging the distribution of his forces. Appointing Major-General Brabazon, who had arrived to command a cavalry brigade, as his second-in-command, he divided the outpost line into two sections separated by the railway, assigning the eastern one to Colonel Porter, and the western to Colonel Fisher of the 10th Hussars, while keeping a strong reserve immediately under his own hand.* On the 18th he carried out a reconnaissance against the enemy's left flank, and then shelled them out of Jasfontein farm buildings and kopjes, an operation in which the New Zealanders had the first opportunity of showing their sterling qualities. Reconnaissance after reconnaissance followed during the next ten days. The casualties involved by this constant "feeling" with the enemy were slight on either side and the immediately tangible results not very apparent. But the moral effect in mystifying and discouraging the Boers and in giving French and his men the confidence and resolution that comes of full knowledge of an enemy's position and familiarity with his methods was very great, and of special value at this critical time when puzzled depression reigned in most other British camps.

Miscellaneous skirmishes.

One result of French's activity was the cessation of all Boer expeditions against the line of communications, and with that menace removed more troops could be spared for forward movements. On December 21 Philipstown was occupied by a detachment from De Aar, and on the 26th the 1st Essex were transferred from De Aar to Naauwpoort, enabling French to bring the Suffolks forward to Arundel. Two days later his command was greatly reinforced, in efficiency if not in numbers, by the arrival of Major Rimington with a squadron of his Guides. Conscious of his growing superiority, French now decided to drive the Boers out of their positions by turning their right flank, and orders

Arrival of reinforcements.

* 1st Brigade, Col. Porter—3 squadrons 6th D.G. (Carabiniers), 1 squadron N.S.W. Lancers, Northern Co. 2nd M.I.; 2nd Brigade, Col. Fisher—2 squadrons Inniskilling Dragoons, 2 squadrons 10th Hussars, Western Co. 2nd M.I. Divisional troops—Brigade Division R.H.A., Col. Eustace ("O" and "R" Batteries), N.Z.M.R., half battalion Berkshires.

for this operation, based on the skilful reconnaissances carried out by his intelligence officer, Captain Lawrence, 17th Lancers, were actually written, when, on the 29th, information came in that the Boers were of their own accord evacuating Rensburg and falling back on Colesberg.

Boers evacuate Rensburg. Dec. 27.

The Boer force had during this period been reinforced to fully 4,500 men. It was therefore still superior to the total force under French's orders in actual numbers, quite apart from its preponderance in mounted men, and its freedom from anxiety as regards its communication. But the persistence and boldness of the British reconnaissances, and their ever-growing extension on either flank, had created in the minds of the burghers a conviction that French was being enormously reinforced, and that conviction soon developed into a nervous apprehension lest they should be surrounded and cut off in the Rensburg kopjes by the vastly superior British forces. They had no confidence in Schoeman, and the more energetic P. de Wet, who had just, owing to Grobler's illness, been temporarily appointed acting head-commandant over all the Free State forces south of the Orange River, was not yet in a position to inspire his subordinates with a more resolute spirit. A *Krygsraad* met on the 27th, and decided that the Rensburg position should be given up at once—ostensibly on the ground of its deficient water supply—and new positions taken up round Colesberg. At the same time urgent appeals for reinforcements were transmitted to Bloemfontein and Pretoria.

Description of Colesberg.

One of the oldest settlements in South Africa—the home of Paul Kruger's infancy—the little township of Colesberg lies securely ensconced in a hollow girt on all sides by hills which form three sides of a rough square. Of the faces of this square, each about five miles long, the southern and eastern, rising abruptly in a battlemented wall of serried kopjes from a perfectly open plain, form an ideal fortress. The western face is less clearly defined. Rising steeply from the town, which nestles at their foot, to a height of from 200 to 300 feet, the hills sprawl irregularly outwards, some in long slopes, some in jutting spurs and ridges, nowhere offering a clearly marked position for defence. The northern

side alone is open; from every other direction Colesberg lies hidden from view—except from one point only. Three miles west of the town, separated by a mile of open plain from the outlying spurs of the western face, rises one of those extraordinary detached hills peculiar to South Africa, and more especially to the region of the Great Karroo. Over 800 feet high, with steep boulder-strewn slopes rising evenly towards a krantz or "coronet" of short precipitous cliffs, Coles Kop from its round flat top looks over all intervening heights down on to the tin roofs and into the dusty streets of Colesberg, and forms the one central figure for the traveller amid the perplexing tangle of the landscape. West and north-west of the Colesberg cluster of hills the plain stretches for six or seven miles to a long chain of hills, through which, at Rietfontein, or Plessis Poort, passes the road running due north from Colesberg for eighteen miles to the wagon bridge over the Orange River—relic of the old transport riding days—while further west, at Bastard's Nek, crosses the road to Petrusville. East and north-east is broken and hilly country. Through this the railway, which enters the Colesberg square through a gap in its southern face and emerges at its north-eastern angle, after sending off a short branch line into Colesberg itself, runs for twenty miles down to Norval's Pont.

Boer positions round Colesberg.

The southern face of the square formed the centre of the defensive position now taken up by the Boers, and here Schoeman intrenched his Transvaalers—the burghers from Johannesburg and its suburbs, the Krugersdorpers, and the Johannesburg Germans—and most of his guns, still trusting that the British general would, like his colleagues elsewhere, ram his head against this almost impregnable front. The wings were in consequence weakly held. The left, covering the railway, extended for some three or four miles south-eastwards in prolongation of the centre, and was manned by the commandos from the southern Free State and the Basuto border. The right wing, covering the alternative communication with the road bridge, was thrown right back along the western face of the square, with outposts extending north-westwards as far as Bastard's Nek, and was held by the

Heilbron and Bethlehem burghers. Small commandos were laagered at both the bridges over the Orange River.

French occupies Rensburg. Dec. 30.

French heard of the evacuation of Rensburg too late to harass the Boers in their withdrawal. But he at once pushed forward (December 30), and successfully located the enemy's new positions by a general reconnaissance with his mounted troops. The immediate result of the reconnaissance was the occupation in force of the deserted position at Rensburg as a new pivot of operations, which the Berkshires were at once set to work strengthening by intrenchments. At the same time Colonel Porter occupied a hill, subsequently known as Porter's Hill, barely two miles from the south-western angle of the Colesberg kopjes, and possessing the same advantage as an observation post, point of contact, and screen, that Vaal Kop had possessed when the enemy were at Rensburg.

He decides to turn Boers out of Colesberg.

The next, and more important, result was the formulation by French of his plan for driving the Boers out of Colesberg. So far from resting content with the satisfactory result of six weeks' continuous operations with an inferior force, he held, in the true spirit of generalship, "that naught was done while aught remained to do;" and, thoroughly alive to the indication of moral weakness furnished by the Boer withdrawal, he decided that his action should be immediate, before the enemy should recover their nerve, or even, awakening to a realization of his weakness, wrest the initiative from him. As regards the general line of attack the reconnaissance only confirmed the opinion which he had already formed at Arundel. A frontal attack on the intrenched Boer centre was the last thing he had thought of. Of the alternative flank attacks that upon the Boer left and the railway communication to Norval's Pont possibly offered the largest results. But it involved a tremendously wide extension, and would expose his flank and line of communications to serious danger of a sudden counter-attack in broken country. A move against the refused Boer right was not only shorter and better protected against a flank attack by the open ground in front of the Boer position, now so usefully commanded by Porter's Hill, but it offered far better tactical features for the attack. And if the Boer communication with Colesberg Wagon Bridge,

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR JOHN FRENCH, K.C.B.,
COMMANDING CAVALRY DIVISION, 1899-1900.
COMMANDING IN CAPE COLONY, 1901-1902.

By kind permission of Messrs. Macmillan & Co., from "With General French and the Cavalry in South Africa."

which he would thus command, was perhaps less vital to the Boers than that with Norval's Pont, it was probably important enough for them to regard its loss as rendering Colesberg untenable, while from the point of view of the subsequent direct advance on Bloemfontein—to which, we should never forget, all French's moves were intended to work up—the seizure of the Wagon Bridge was an objective whose strategical importance could hardly be overrated. These were sufficient reasons to determine French's choice.

Attack ordered for Jan. 1.

A further personal reconnaissance on the morning of the 31st settled the final details of the plan. By midday orders were issued. The attack was entrusted to Colonel Fisher, who was to march that afternoon with the whole of his brigade, the whole of the brigade division of artillery—except two guns of "R" Battery—the four companies of the Berkshires, and some mounted engineers, to Maeder's Farm, eight miles north-west of Rensburg. A night march of nearly five miles from Maeder's would bring the infantry to the nearest outlying spur of the western face of the Boer position, which French intended them to seize and occupy, while Fisher was to take on the rest of the column and, occupying the spurs and kopjes further to the north, work round and seize positions commanding the Colesberg Bridge road. To cover the attack, and to prevent the enemy massing upon the flank to be assailed, Porter was directed to make a strong demonstration from Porter's Hill against the centre of the Boer position. For this purpose his brigade was strengthened by the New Zealanders and two guns of "R" Battery, but was ordered to spare a squadron of Carabiniers to Major Rimington, who, with this squadron and with his Guides, was ordered to move round the enemy's left flank towards Achtertang, making a show of force as if to threaten the railway to Norval's Pont.

Capture of McCracken's Hill.

Marching from Rensburg at 5 P.M.—the infantry in wagons, for French was determined to risk no repetition of the Stormberg failure—the column reached Maeder's at 9 P.M. At 12.30 A.M. on New Year's Day it started again, the infantry and mounted infantry leading. The road to Colesberg was followed for two and a half miles, and then

the column turned north-east across the veld. It was a dark, moonless night and, in spite of all precautions, the two rear companies of the Berkshires lost touch, but were recalled in time to reach the objective of the attack before dawn. A Boer picket, suddenly awakened, was brushed aside, and Major McCracken and his men found themselves in possession of the western end of the hill destined henceforward to bear his name. The Heilbron commando, 600 strong, under Commandant Van Vuuren, had been responsible for its defence, but, negligent or panic-stricken, they were not there to dispute its capture, and only by degrees began to open a sputtering fire on the Berkshires from the eastern portion of the hill, from a kopje to the north-east called Gibraltar, and from the ridge, subsequently known as the Kloof Ridge 1,000 yards to the north.

Failure of the cavalry to work round.

The mounted troops had halted to the east of Coles Kop where the first glimmering of light brought them a string of pom-pom shells from the Boer main position. French, who was at Coles Kop, ordered Colonel Eustace to shell the western face of the Boer positions, and about 4.15 A.M. an artillery duel began between the ten British guns drawn up in line of batteries on the open plain and the Boer guns, two pom-poms and a 15-pounder captured at Stormberg, safely screened among the hills. After nearly three hours the Boer guns ceased, and French ordered Major Sir J. Jervis to take "O" Battery close up to McCracken's Hill and help to keep down the now heavy rifle-fire from the enemy at the other end, who had meanwhile been reinforced from the centre by the Germiston burghers under Commandant Gravett. An attempt on the part of the enemy to outflank the British left by working along the Kloof Ridge was checked about 9 A.M. by the carbine fire of the Hussars and mounted sappers, and by Major Burton's "R" Battery, which had trotted west to meet the movement. The hills at the western end of the Kloof Ridge, forming the kloof or valley which gave it its name, were now occupied, but further attempts, not very vigorously pressed, on the part of the cavalry to work round to the north were frustrated by the Bethlehem burghers under Naude, who had hurried out from their laager just in

time to occupy the heights west of the Wagon Bridge road, and towards 2 P.M. the firing on this side gradually died down. The total British casualties for the day were only 1 officer and 6 men killed and 21 men wounded, the Boer casualties rather heavier.

Operations on the right.

On the right Porter had meanwhile been vigorously engaged with the Boer centre, pushing his demonstration to the point of attempting to carry an outlying position with his New Zealanders, and most effectively keeping the Boers pinned to their trenches. Still further east Rimington, who with his two squadrons had left Jasfontein at midnight, pushed boldly round the Boer flank to within three miles of Joubert Siding on the railway. From here he could look right into the Boer camps east of Colesberg, and successfully repelled an attack by a small party of Boers sent against him by Commandant Du Toit. This party was in fact the advanced guard of a considerable force with which Schoeman had that very morning intended to make a comprehensive attack on the British right, if French had not anticipated him by attacking first. It was this strengthening of the Boer left, coupled with the energy and boldness with which Porter and Rimington bluffed the large force opposed to them into a purely passive defence, that made the success on the British left possible.

Dispositions after Jan. 1.

That success was indeed incomplete owing to the failure of Fisher's column on the extreme left to carry out the task assigned to it. But for this, French was fully convinced that he could have occupied Colesberg that self-same afternoon.* Even so, though for the moment he was but hanging on to the ground he had gained, French was confident that he only wanted slight reinforcement to take Colesberg, and telegraphed to Cape Town for a battery, a battalion of infantry, and two cavalry squadrons. The next two days were chiefly spent in strengthening the positions secured in preparation for a further move when the reinforcements arrived.† The Berkshires and mounted infantry remained

* See French's despatch of Feb. 2, 1900.

† During the night of the 2nd a loaded supply train standing in Rensburg station slipped down the incline towards Colesberg and came to

on McCracken's Hill with their camp down at the Kloof, while the 10th Hussars on the Kloof Hills were replaced by six companies of the Suffolks. Two sections of "R" Battery were kept east of Coles Kop in support of these positions. Fisher's cavalry brigade with the rest of the guns was to patrol the left flank, but owing to the scarcity of water its bivouack had to be thrown as far back as Maeder's. Rensburg, Porter's Hill, and Maeder's were connected by field telegraph.

Boer counter-stroke repulsed. Jan. 3.

French had not been mistaken on the 1st in believing his enemy to be thoroughly demoralized by his bold and sudden attack. All day long Schoeman had been sending agitated messages to Bloemfontein, and very little more would have sufficed to lead to a general stampede of the burghers from Colesberg, where they believed they were in danger of being completely enveloped. But the comparative quiet of the next day enabled them to recover from their confusion, and the arrival of the Johannesburg Police from Natal encouraged them sufficiently to decide to attempt a counterstroke. When the British cavalry returned to camp on the evening of the 3rd, Piet De Wet moved out of Colesberg with 600–800 men, four guns, and two pom-poms, and occupied a number of low kopjes about a mile north and north-west of the Kloof. At daybreak—completely surprising the small picket of Inniskillings, which was all that Fisher had kept out to patrol this important section—the Boers opened a determined attack on the left flank and rear of the Suffolk position. With great promptitude and initiative the two supporting sections of "R" Battery, under Lieutenants Lamont and Talbot-Ponsonby, came into action against them, while the Suffolks on their side kept up a brisk rifle-fire. When, in addition to this, the 10th Hussars with two guns of "R" Battery moved out from Maeder's and began working round the rear of the Boers, while the four guns of "O" Battery shelled them heavily in front, the majority of the

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grief in a broken culvert close to the Boer position. It was impossible to save it, and in the course of the day the Boer shells succeeded in igniting the *débris* and destroying most of the stores.

burghers lost heart and bolted across the open plain with the 10th Hussars and a squadron of Inniskillings in pursuit. A small party took up a covering position in some rocky ground. The 10th Hussars, gallantly led by Fisher, carried the position by a dismounted attack, in which Major Harvey was killed, but the delay had effected its purpose and the Boers got away safely. Some 200, however, still contested the low kopjes north-west of the Kloof. Under cover of a heavy cross-fire from the horse artillery, Captain De Lisle, who had just arrived from Hanover Road with two more companies of the 2nd Mounted Infantry, worked round under cover to the foot of the hills and dismounted his men for the attack. De Lisle's skilful leading and the excellent shooting of the men soon caused the Boers to make off in small parties, and when towards 3 P.M. De Lisle finally carried the position, only some 35 remained to fall into his hands as prisoners. The total British casualties were again only 20 or 30. The Boer losses, apart from prisoners, were heavier, and, coupled with the effect of their failure and the fright of the cavalry pursuit, reduced them once more to a state of profound discouragement. Only the knowledge that considerable reinforcements were on their way still kept them in their positions.

French's plan for turning Grassy Hill.

Meanwhile French was already receiving the reinforcements he had asked for. The 1st Battalion Yorkshire Regiment, the 4th Battery, R.F.A., and a squadron of colonial mounted infantry from Rosmead arrived on the 4th, and one and a half squadrons of the composite regiment of Household Cavalry on the 5th. The whole of the Suffolks were now concentrated at Kloof Camp; the Essex were moved up to Rensburg and Porter's Hill, setting free Porter's brigade and the New Zealanders for more active work; while the Yorkshires, distributed between Rensburg, Arundel and Naauwpoort, looked after the communications. French was now ready for another attempt on Colesberg, and a careful reconnaissance on the 5th satisfied him that the key of the position was a large hill, known as Grassy Hill, 3,000 yards east of Kloof Camp. This hill not only completely commanded the Wagon Bridge road and Colesberg station, but its capture,

by taking in reverse Gibraltar and the eastern end of the Kloof Ridge, would also render untenable all the Boer positions on the western side and immediately compel the evacuation of Colesberg. At 6 P.M. he issued orders for the morrow's operations. The mounted forces and horse artillery on the left flank, together with the 4th Battery and detachments from the Suffolks and Berkshires, were to start from near Kloof Camp at 5 A.M. and operate from north and west, so as to capture Grassy Hill, while Porter demonstrated against the Boer centre as before. The whole plan, in fact, was practically a repetition of the plan that had proved so successful on the 1st, but with this difference, that this time French assigned the command to Colonel Eustace, R.H.A., instead of to Colonel Fisher, and that, with his troops so much nearer the enemy's position, he considered a night march and night attack superfluous. After the experience of the past few days, French had every reason to expect that this comparatively easy operation would be crowned with success, and may well have looked forward, as he returned to his camp at Rensburg that evening, to spending his next night under a roof in reconquered Colesberg.

French yields to Watson's desire for a night attack.

At 7 P.M. Colonel Eustace brought round to the General an urgent request from Colonel Watson, commanding the Suffolks at Kloof Camp, to be allowed to take Grassy Hill by a night attack with half his battalion. Watson had already made the same suggestion to French earlier in the day, when he accompanied him on his reconnaissance, but had been refused. This time, however, French, having every confidence in Watson, yielded to his importunity, and gave him a free hand to carry out this part of the operations in his own way, only directing him to inform troops in the vicinity of the change of plan. The orders for the general turning movement, nevertheless, still held good.

The night march to Grassy Hill. Jan. 6.

Soon after midnight Colonel Watson marched out of camp with A, B, D, and H companies of his regiment, the men wearing soft shoes and carrying 200 rounds of ammunition. It was not till the first halt that he explained the objective of the march, informing his subordinates that no very serious resistance was likely to be offered, if indeed the

hill was occupied at all, and laying the very greatest stress on the necessity of all rifles being unloaded, and of the assault being delivered with the bayonet alone—a warning which he again repeated at the next halt, when he once more took care to explain to the officers precisely what he intended each company to do. About 3 A.M. the little column arrived without incident at the watercourse at the base of the hill. From here a gradual slope, with an occasional outcrop of shaly rock forming in places steps of two or three feet rise, leads up for some 700 yards to the near crest of the hill; the ground then rises very gently for 200 yards to the further crest before falling away steeply on the side towards the Wagon Bridge road. It was this rear crest that the Boers held, only a few sentries being thrown out as far as the western edge of the hill. So far from the hill being unoccupied, 200 Heilbron burghers were assigned to its defence, of whom fully half were actually on the hill in readiness, while the newly-arrived "Zarps" were camped close by.

Failure of the Suffolks' attack.

About two-thirds of the way up the force halted in quarter column while the rise above was reconnoitred. Then H and D companies advanced, accompanied by the colonel. As they reached the crest a single shot was fired by a sentry. But the men pushed straight on across the almost level summit, and were already half-way across when suddenly a burst of firing broke out from the further edge. With a loud cheer H company charged, but the rush died away in face of the withering fire. Thinking the best chance of success lay in getting his men back below the crest and rallying them together with the rear companies for a second attempt, Colonel Watson gave the order to "retire." The fatal word, repeated from man to man in the dark, broke the cohesion of the whole. More than half the men rushed blindly down the hill and eventually returned to camp. The rest were inextricably mixed, and though Colonel Watson and the company officers attempted to re-form them, and gallantly led them forward in repeated bayonet charges which almost carried home into the Boer position, their efforts proved unavailing, more especially as the Heilbron men were now reinforced by

a strong party of police led by Lieutenant D. S. Maré. Shortly before dawn Watson himself was killed, and most of his officers killed and disabled. The support of Eustace's guns, which came into action with daylight, was too late to convert failure into success, and about 5.30 A.M. the remnant of the attacking force, now practically surrounded at 50 yards' range, surrendered. The failure of the Suffolks' attack seems to have paralyzed the whole force, and though the carrying out of French's original plan was still not impossible, no attempt was made to retrieve the disaster by turning the right flank of the Boer position and renewing the attack in broad daylight.

Seriousness of the check.

This unsuccessful affair, which, like Magersfontein, demonstrated the superiority of the magazine rifle over the *arme blanche*, even in the dark, cost the British 11 officers and 150 men, of whom 5 officers and 32 men were killed or died of their wounds, 4 officers and 48 men were wounded, and 2 unwounded officers and 70 men made prisoners. What was far more serious for French than the actual loss in men was the loss of the moral superiority he had so successfully won for himself, and the loss of an opportunity that was not to present itself again; for before French was ready to resume the attack, the reinforcements so urgently clamoured for by Schoeman had arrived, bringing the Boer force up to fully 6,000 men. The Boer loss on January 6 was 9 killed or died of wounds, including Lieutenant Maré, and 26 wounded. The victors treated their wounded prisoners well, and were most sympathetic and courteous to the British burial party which went out on the following morning. They readily gave their help, and a pathetic scene took place at the open graveside. A grey-headed burgher asked leave to make an address. In a rough, simple way he deprecated war and the sacrifice of human life, and prayed for the time when all men should live at peace with each other. Then the assembled burghers sang a psalm.

Occupation of Slingersfontein. Jan. 9. Operations on right flank.

The unlucky Suffolks were now sent down to Arundel and Port Elizabeth to re-officer, their place at Kloof Camp being taken by the Essex, whose defences were in turn taken over by the Yorkshires. The left flank was now as strong as

ever, but for the moment French decided not to press his operations against a point where his enemy was now strongly reinforced and on the alert. A move to the right would both act as a diversion and prevent the Boers making a turning movement on this side, where they had up till then been successfully held back by the mere pretence of a force. A reconnaissance on the 7th along the hills to the east of the Boer position, and almost up to the railway, led French to fix on Slingersfontein Farm, eleven miles north-east of Rensburg, as a suitable base for a mobile force acting on this wing. On the 9th, under cover of a demonstration and bombardment along the enemy's centre and right, Porter occupied the farm and adjoining hills with the Carabiniers, New South Wales Lancers, New Zealanders, four guns "O" Battery, a mounted section R.E., and two companies of the Yorkshires. On the 11th French moved out from Slingersfontein against the enemy, who, under Schoeman and De la Rey, the latter of whom had just arrived from Magersfontein, had occupied the northern part of the long ridge running from near Slingersfontein towards the railway, and other positions covering the line. At one stage in the action the Household Cavalry had secured a good position on the Boer left flank, and French hoped to push the enemy back westwards and get across the railway. But the arrival of a strong Boer force from Norval's Pont frustrated this hope, and French gradually retired his men. An attempt on the part of Major Hunter-Weston with a detachment of his mounted R.E. and half a squadron to cut the railway and telegraph further east was also checked when just on the point of success. The Boer force which arrived so inconveniently was the Johannesburg commando from Natal, part of the reinforcements which had been steadily arriving during the last few days, and had been specially hurried up in anticipation of a British attack by a telegram from P. De Wet early in the morning.

Attack on New Zealand Hill. Jan. 15.

De la Rey now took over the command of the Boer left with a force of about 1,000 men, mainly composed of Johannesburgers and of the Johannesburg Police under Van Dam, and soon began to make his arrival felt. On the

13th he shelled Slingersfontein camp at long range. This reconnaissance he followed up on the 15th by a determined attempt to make Porter's position untenable by capturing the high, steep hill, afterwards known as New Zealand Hill, immediately to the north-west of the camp. The northern extremity of the hill was held by a weak half company of Yorkshires under Captain Orr, posted in two parallel sangars at the top of the slope, while some 60 New Zealanders under Captain W. N. Madocks (Lieut. R.F.A.) were disposed on the eastern side of the ridge. At daybreak some 300 Boers posted themselves in the rock and bush-covered kopjes to north and east and began firing on the British sangars, their fire steadily increasing in intensity from 6.30 till about 10 A.M., by which time the British hardly dared look over the sangars to fire. Madocks had already sent out a strong flanking detachment to a spur on the east of the hill to cover the dead ground on the eastern slope. Suddenly, about 11.30, he heard the crack of Mauser rifles quite close on his left. Sending another small party to work along the west slope of the hill, Madocks ran across to the Yorkshire sangars, only to find them in possession of the Boers, and the Yorkshires lying about among the rocks on the summit, officerless and thoroughly helpless. Under cover of the fire a party of about 50 Boers had climbed unperceived up the dead ground on the steep north-western end of the hill. A gallant handful of "Zarps" at their head, led by Sergeant-Major van Bouillon, had crawled right up to the forward sangar and then, leaping suddenly to their feet, had wounded Captain Orr, killed the colour-sergeant, and driven out the men.

Madocks's charge.

The Boers were already swarming up on every side, but with rare presence of mind Madocks took command of the wavering men and giving the words, "Fix bayonets — charge!" rushed forward at their head. The secondary work was recaptured, but the Boers, taking cover behind the first sangar, kept up a murderous fire at point-blank range. Again Madocks tried to charge, but only two men came over the wall with him. Escaping almost miraculously, he made his way back to cover and called aloud for his own men.

A moment later a dozen New Zealanders came tearing over the crest and into the sangar. A brief pause for breath, and then Madocks once more gave the word to charge. Four men leapt over the wall together: Sergeant Gourlay, Madocks, Trooper Connell, and Lieutenant Hughes. Gourlay and Connell were shot as they leapt. But the charge had already succeeded, helped as it now was by the fire of the little detachment Madocks had sent round the left flank. The Boers turned and bolted down the hill, hotly pursued by the New Zealanders. A minute later the whole hillside and the surrounding kopjes were alive with retreating Boers, on whom a heavy fire was directed. Twenty-one dead Boers were subsequently found at the foot of the hill, and many other casualties were inflicted in the retreat. The British lost eight killed and a proportionate number of wounded. For once the tactics of Majuba and of Nicholson's Nek had been foiled in the moment of success by a junior officer's forethought and courage. But for Madocks's charge all would have been over in a few minutes, but even the charge could not have saved the hill if the flanking detachments had not confined the attack to its narrow northern end.

N.S.W. Lancers cut off. Jan. 16.

On the 16th occurred the only other "unfortunate incident" beside the Suffolk affair which happened to French's force during the whole of his operations. A patrol of 25 New South Wales Lancers under Lieutenant Dowling were cut off to the east of Slingersfontein by a party of Pretoria Police under Lieutenant P. C. De Hart, and forced to surrender after a creditable attempt to break clear, in which Dowling and Sergeant-Major Griffin were killed.

Operations on left flank. Guns hauled on to Coles Kop.

The left flank meanwhile was not forgotten. French himself reconnoitred towards Bastard's Nek on the 10th, and during the fight on the 11th De Lisle, with a small force, pushed north of Bastard's Nek, and by a skilful reconnaissance ascertained that the Boers were in force at Plessis Poort and occupied the ridges up to Bastard's Nek. On the 14th Major Allenby, of the Inniskillings, with a small mounted force was sent right round by the west of Bastard's Nek to

threaten and, if possible, damage the Wagon Bridge. Allenby got within 5,000 yards of the bridge, where he found a commando in laager. After firing a few shells at it he retired, the Boers from Plessis Poort making an ineffectual attempt to cut him off. The positions already secured were steadily improved. On the 11th, by the enterprise and energy of Major Butcher of the 4th Battery, R.F.A., a 15-pounder was dragged up the almost precipitous side of Coles Kop, followed by another on the 16th. By sinking the trails the gunners were able to range to nearly 9,000 yards. The material effect at this range was inconsiderable, but the annoyance to the Boers, who suddenly found shells dropping into all their laagers, and were forced to shift camp and stow themselves away in inaccessible and inconvenient valleys, and the sense of insecurity created, well repaid the effort. Even better evidence of the tenacity with which French clung to the advantage he had gained on this side on New Year's Day was the retention of the Berkshires on McCracken's Hill. Separated by a dip barely 500 yards across from the enemy on the other end of the hill, and subject to constant artillery and rifle-fire, this admirable regiment had held on for a fortnight and was to hold on for twice as long again to the position they had so successfully seized. Their maintenance of so exposed and difficult a post and the smallness of their casualty list furnish a most instructive instance of what can be done by a proper combination of intelligence in the selection of ground, skill in the construction of cover, and good shooting.

Summary of the operations.

With Lord Roberts's arrival the Colesberg operations entered upon a new and, perhaps, less interesting phase, which will be more appropriately dealt with in conjunction with the larger policy to which they then became subordinated. But the operations already described provide quite sufficient material for an appreciation of the work done by General French in his campaign in front of Colesberg. Of the strategical results of that campaign it is enough to say that, beginning with a mere handful of men, French at once checked the invasion of Cape Colony, saved the important Midland line of communications, and covered the exposed

flanks of Methuen's and Gatacre's forces. From the moment that he began advancing he attracted to Colesberg a constant stream of Boer reinforcements withdrawn from the very points where the main issue of the war was afterwards decided. The moral result of an almost unbroken series of successes, however small, at this critical time, and in the region of Cape Colony, where the consequences of rebellion would have been the most disastrous, was hardly less important. As regards the tactical methods so successfully employed by him, they may be described as a scientific adaptation of the Boer tactics, of which he had already had a brief but convincing experience in Natal. The constant feeling for the enemy's flanks, the widely extended line of mutually supporting positions, the laagers distributed in rear—these were Boer tactics and nothing else. What was more than mere Boer tactics was the insight into the enemy's plans, the untiring aggressiveness, the scientific concentration of force in order to strike a blow, the skilful co-ordination of the different arms. French's success is often attributed to the fact that he commanded a mounted force at a time when others had nothing but infantry. But as a matter of fact his mounted troops at no time formed half his total strength, or a third of the strength of the mounted enemy opposed to him. It was his skill in using them, and using them only for purposes which infantry were not equally fitted for, that made them so effective. The full and continuous utilization of the whole of his force was, indeed, the secret of his success throughout. No other general at this stage of the war wasted fewer men on his communications and containing forces, none brought a larger proportion of his men into the firing-line at the point of attack. French was, no doubt, well supported. In Major Douglas Haig he possessed an invaluable staff officer, one of the few in the whole Army capable of doing real general staff work. The intelligence, under Captain Lawrence, was admirably conducted, and the completeness of the telegraphing and signalling arrangements between the different positions contributed no little to the security of so scattered a force. The good work of the troops themselves—the steadiness of the Berkshires, the gallantry of the New Zealanders, the ubiquitous and

absolutely untiring activity of the two horse artillery batteries—has already been dwelt on in the narrative. But neither was French exempt from his share of more average troops, of inactive and hesitating commanders. And in any event the good work of the troops is no detraction from the merits of a leader, but only, in most cases, an additional testimony to the quality of his leadership.

CHAPTER VII

THE SIEGE OF LADYSMITH

White's decision to stay in Ladysmith.

We must now turn our attention once more to the Natal Field Force, whose fortunes we have not followed since its defeat and isolation at the end of the brief campaign which opened at Talana and closed ten days later outside Ladysmith. The reasons which decided Sir George White to stay on in Ladysmith, at the sacrifice of the original *raison d'être* of his force, have already been discussed at some length in an earlier chapter.* It is sufficient for our present purpose to recall the main conclusion there arrived at, namely, that these reasons, however valid in themselves, would hardly have weighed with a general of the first rank against the disadvantages of a policy which involved not merely the sending of reinforcements, but the organizing of relief operations on a large scale at the cost of wrecking the whole original plan of campaign. But granting White's decision to stay, the further question arises, in what capacity was he to maintain himself at Ladysmith, and how could he now best fulfil both his original duty of protecting Natal from invasion, and the new duty, implied by his decision, of facilitating the task of the relieving force?

The field force policy.

There were two main alternatives before White. The first was to maintain the character of his force as a field army, not strong enough indeed to venture on another general engagement, or even to protect its communications with the south, but capable of occupying the whole of the enemy's forces by a series of vigorous offensive-defensive operations carried out within striking distance of its base at Ladysmith, till a thoroughgoing offensive should once more

* Vol. ii., pp. 260–264.

be rendered feasible by the approach of a relieving force. The essential condition of this policy was to continue in occupation of an area sufficiently extended to secure freedom of manœuvre for his own troops, and to prevent the encircling Boer commandos from ever drawing so close as to form a continuous impenetrable ring of investment round him. Such an area might be held by a chain of intrenched posts supporting each other at considerable intervals, while a mobile force in the centre could act as a reserve to relieve any point that was attacked in force, or, better still, prevent any general concentration of the enemy by continually taking the initiative itself. It was undoubtedly the most effective policy that White could now have pursued, and, judging by the success with which General French was to carry out a similar policy in Cape Colony immediately afterwards, White might not only have kept the whole Boer army occupied almost indefinitely, but might even to some extent have retrieved the position he had lost by the unlucky battle of October 30. At the same time it was a policy involving considerable risk if the Boers showed themselves enterprising and capable of rapid concentration for a vigorous offensive.

The garrison policy.

The second alternative open to White was to play for safety, frankly to abandon the idea of a field force, and to turn his troops into a garrison holding a continuous line of defensive positions immediately round Ladysmith itself, till such time as relief should come or supplies finally run out. The disadvantages of such a policy were obvious. As a closely besieged garrison the Ladysmith force would have very little operating power, and the number of the enemy which it would contain would depend almost entirely on the enemy's own choice. If the Boers, instead of devoting their whole attention to the capture of Ladysmith, detached the bulk of their force in order to invade southern Natal, or to meet the relieving army, White could do practically nothing to prevent them. In other words, by submitting to a regular siege, White would largely put it out of his power to fulfil his duty either towards Natal or towards the relieving force. There was only one way in which he could allow himself to be besieged and yet to some extent fulfil those duties:

that was to send out of Ladysmith and across the Tugela all the troops that were not absolutely required for the defence, more especially the bulk of the mounted troops and some of the field artillery.* It is even questionable whether he ought not in that case to have gone out of Ladysmith himself with General Hunter and the staff of the field force, leaving to Colonel Knox the continuation of that purely local defence of Ladysmith with which he had already been entrusted on October 30.

White compromises between the two policies.

To a definite decision between these two alternatives, Sir G. White found it very difficult to bring himself. The idea of breaking up the Natal Field Force, and abandoning all hope of using it again as a striking arm, was one which he was very loth to accept. Hunter and French in vain urged him to send out the brigade of regular cavalry, and a suggestion from Buller to the same effect, sent on October 31, only elicited the reply next day that the cavalry could not get out without heavy loss, but that he would send out one regiment if the road became clear again.† In theory, at least, White was resolved to follow out the first of the policies indicated above, and to maintain the character of his field force unimpaired. Unfortunately the result of the fighting on October 30 had so completely shaken his confidence in the striking power of his force, and so impressed him with the numbers and mobility of the Boers, and with the danger of an immediate general attack, that in practice he confined himself strictly to the second policy, justifying

* Quite apart from their usefulness in protecting Natal, the sending out of artillery and mounted troops would have directly contributed to the maintenance of the defence. Want of supplies, want of forage, and want of gun ammunition (White had under 300 rounds per field gun), and not the Boer attack, were the real dangers that Ladysmith had to face. The cavalrymen and gunners ate food which might have gone to keep more infantrymen healthy and fit to fight; their horses starved on forage which might have kept a small mounted reserve really mobile, and contributed to the insanitary condition of the place; ammunition had to be husbanded so carefully that fewer guns could practically have done the same work. In this respect, as in every other, it is difficult to resist the conclusion that White's failure to come to a clear decision between two policies prejudiced the course of the siege as it did that of the whole campaign.

† See Evidence War Commission, 14838.

the retention of the cavalry to himself by the plea of their usefulness as a mounted reserve, and by the hope of carrying out a more active policy on some later occasion—an occasion which, not wholly through his own fault, never came. It is not easy, in fact, to recognize any definite purpose in Sir G. White's actions during the brief interval between his defeat and his complete investment, beyond the one very definite resolve to do nothing rash.

The Ladysmith valley.

How completely Sir G. White and his staff were dominated in practice by the purely passive policy of submitting to a regular siege is clear from a consideration of the positions now taken up. The town of Ladysmith lies in the north-western angle of one of those hill-girt plains that in South Africa furnish the nearest equivalent to the valleys of other countries. This plain, whose length from north-west to south-east is about five miles, with a width of nearly four miles at its broadest part, is bounded on the north and west by a complex of broken kopjes and ridges varying from 100 to 200 feet in height, which separate it on the one side from the difficult hilly country extending from Pepworth Hill to the west of the Upper Klip River—the scene of Colonel Carleton's disaster—and on the other from the great rolling plain which extends westwards and south-westwards to the Tugela. In its south-western angle stretches for three miles the table-topped ridge known as Cæsar's Camp, and, in its western portion, as Wagon Hill. This ridge rises some 300 feet above the plain, and is divided by a valley, barely 2,000 yards across at its widest, from the hills that rise in successive tiers to the main mass of Onderbroek and Grobelaar's Hill before sinking down towards Colenso. The rest of the southern and south-eastern border of the plain is formed by the low ridges and kopjes beyond which lie Nelthorpe Station and the plain extending to Pieter's Heights. The imposing plateau of Bulwana, two miles long and over 400 feet high, and the bold, truncated cone of Lombard's Kop, with its underfeatures, Gun Hill and Umbrella Hill, occupy the whole eastern edge of the plain, leaving at the north-eastern corner a broad gap leading out to the scene of the main battle of October 30. From north-west to south-east the

Klip River winds its way through the plain, enclosing Ladysmith in its first great loop. The railway enters the plain from the south, following the right bank of the Klip as far as the Intombi Spruit, and then cuts straight across, skirting the town, for a narrow passage between the kopjes on the north, beyond which the Harrismith branch turns off to the north-west, while the main line runs north-eastwards to Modderspruit and Elandslaagte.

Possession of the whole valley essential to a field force.

To maintain his force as a field force, capable of imposing its will upon the enemy, it was essential that White should be in undisputed possession of the Ladysmith plain and of its main exits—in other words, that he should occupy, or at least deny to the enemy, the whole circle of hills surrounding it. With its many level roads and abundant watering facilities, the plain would then furnish almost unrivalled opportunities for the rapid and undisturbed concentration of a mobile force in any direction, whether for reinforcement or for sortie. The key of the whole position from this point of view was the eastern side of the plain. Bulwana and Lombard's Kop not only covered the plain behind them, but commanded the whole country beyond. Their occupation would keep the Boer laagers at a respectful distance, and, by denying to the enemy the use of the road from Modderspruit to Colenso, make the maintenance of a complete circle of investment both difficult and dangerous, and, indeed, almost impossible the moment a relieving force was in possession of the heights on the right bank of the Tugela, barely six miles from the southern end of Bulwana.

Selection of a smaller perimeter indicates a more passive policy.

But if, on the other hand, White was convinced that such a policy of active defence was beyond the capacities of his force, and that a serious catastrophe could only be averted by submission to a regular siege, then the maintenance of the whole twenty miles of perimeter of the Ladysmith plain might well seem a doubtful undertaking, especially when we remember the views then current with regard to the number of men required to hold defensive positions. In that case it might be advisable to abandon to the enemy the eastern and southern part of the plain, with the hills bordering it,

which lay farthest from Ladysmith. The disadvantage caused by the loss of a splendid grazing ground and by long-distance shelling from Lombard's Kop and Bulwana—though, as a matter of fact, nobody seems to have realized the possibility of the latter till it actually happened—would, it might reasonably be argued, be more than compensated by the increased strength and safety of the shorter line of defences. With modern rifles, the plain itself, with the natural shelter trench formed by the winding Klip and its tributary spruits, provided an excellent defence on one side of Ladysmith. For the rest, all that was required was to hold the shortest line of kopjes round the town which gave a clear field of fire and kept the enemy's artillery at a reasonable distance. This was in fact the defensive line now selected by Sir G. White, and by adopting it he admitted, in act if not in words, that the Natal Field Force had ceased to exist, and that its place was henceforth to be taken by the garrison of Ladysmith.

Disposition of the troops.

The environs of Ladysmith lend themselves to a policy of pure defence far more readily than is generally supposed. The perimeter eventually held gave the defenders a clear field of fire for 1,400 yards and upwards along almost its whole extent.* Before October 30 a series of field works calculated for the defence of the town itself had been constructed by Major Rice, R.E., and these formed the basis, at any rate on the north-eastern side, of the defence scheme which was now formulated and put into execution. The whole perimeter was divided into four sections, known as A, B, C, and D, under the command of Colonel Knox, Major-General Howard, Major-General Ian Hamilton, and Colonel Royston. Section A extended from Devonshire Post, the easternmost of the kopjes on the northern edge of the Ladysmith plain, to Cove Redoubt, some three miles to the west. Devonshire Post, Helpmakaar Hill, Cemetery Hill, Tunnel Hill, and Gloucester Post, to the east of the railway, were at the opening of the siege

* On the north-east there was, at one point, cover to within 800 yards of the British trenches, and on the south-west a gap of only 900 yards separated Wagon Point from Mounted Infantry Hill.

held by the Devons, half the 1st 60th, half the Liverpools, and the remnant of the Gloucesters. Immediately west of the junction of the Harrismith and Newcastle Railways was Junction Hill, with a naval 4·7 gun guarded by two companies of Liverpools. The other 4·7 and the remaining two companies of the Liverpools were on Cove Redoubt, while the naval 12-pounders and the chief station of the naval brigade was between the two on Gordon Hill. This section had the smallest clear field of rifle-fire and was exposed to converging artillery-fire from every quarter. But it was strongly manned, and its commander, Colonel Knox, had not been at Plevna in 1877 for nothing. Under his vigorous direction and by the willing exertions of officers and men, the open stone breastworks already in existence were improved, connected with a curtain of stone wall, and made accessible by covered ways, till eventually the whole section became one continuous fortification. The scrub on the plain in front of the eastern portion was cut down and converted into three parallel lines of *abattis* 100 yards apart. West of Knox came Howard's section, manned by the Leicesters, Rifle Brigade, and the bulk of the two battalions of the 60th. This section extended westwards from Leicester Post, past King's Post to Ration Post, along the north side of the valley in which the "tin camp" of the permanent garrison was situated, and then southward and south-eastward by Rifleman's Post to Range Post on the right bank of the Klip River. The northern face of this section was strongly fortified and practically continuous with A section. On the western face the works were lighter and more isolated. This was even more the case with Hamilton's section, the longest and most weakly held of them all, which continued south-eastward from Range Post, past Highlander's Post and Maiden's Castle, up to Cæsar's Camp, the latter held by the Manchesters, and the other points by half the Gordons and the two surviving companies of the Irish Fusiliers. From half-way down the slope of Cæsar's Camp to Devonshire Post the plain was picketed and patrolled by the Natal Volunteers under Royston.

A proportion of the artillery was assigned to each section.

Artillery positions.

In addition to the naval guns, the most powerful weapons of the defence, posted along the northern portion of Knox's section, Helpmakaar Hill and Devonshire Post were strengthened by the inclusion in their system of works of the field guns of the 13th Battery (Dawkins) and of two 6·3 howitzers of obsolete pattern which had been sent round from Port Elizabeth at White's request. Although these guns only had a range of some 3,000 yards, they proved of signal service throughout the siege, and admirably handled by Captain W. H. Christie and a scratch crew of gunners from the unlucky 10th Mountain Battery, kept down the fire of any gun which the enemy pushed within their range. The 42nd Battery (Goulburn) was sent, as soon as a practicable road was made, to Cæsar's Camp, and posted by sections in skilfully designed pits along the main plateau. The 69th Battery was held in support of Howard's section of the defences. The remaining three batteries, the 21st, 53rd, and 67th, together with Brocklehurst's cavalry brigade and half the Gordons, were kept as a central reserve. These dispositions and the composition of the reserve were, however, considerably varied in the course of the siege. A very complete system of telephonic communication was established between the different posts and Sir G. White's headquarters in Ladysmith. The total length of the perimeter was nearly fourteen miles, and the force available for its defence amounted, inclusive of the reserve, to over 13,000 men.*

* Troops in Ladysmith:—Naval Brigade: two 4·7 inch, four 12-pdr., four maxims, 284 officers and men; Natal Naval Volunteers.

Royal Artillery: 13th, 21st, 42nd, 53rd, 67th, 69th Batteries, R.F.A., four 15-pdr., two 6·3 howitzers, two 12½-pdr. (captured at Elandslaagte), two 9-pdr. (No. 10 Mountain Battery), two 3-pdr. Hotchkiss (Natal Hotchkiss detachment), Ammunition Column.

Mounted troops: 5th Dragoon Guards, 5th Lancers, 18th and 19th Hussars, Natal Carbineers, Natal Mounted Rifles, Border Mounted Rifles, Natal Mounted Police, Imperial Light Horse; about 2,800 men.

Infantry: 1st Liverpools, 1st Devons, 1st Gloucesters (four companies), 1st Manchesters, 1st and 2nd King's Royal Rifles, Royal Irish Fusiliers (two companies), 1st Leicesters, 2nd Gordons, 2nd Rifle Brigade, 2nd Dublin Fusiliers (half company); total over 6,000 men.

Engineers: 23rd Field Company, balloon section, telegraph section; Army Service Corps and Army Ordnance Department.

Town guard: about 250 men.

The Boers after the battle of Ladysmith.

For the Boers the battle of Ladysmith had created an opportunity for inflicting a crushing blow on their enemy, such as was never to present itself to them again. With nearly 22,000 men concentrated round White's shaken and dispirited force, they might with every prospect of success have attempted to rush Ladysmith during the first day or two after the battle, when it was still practically unfortified. But such an attempt, involving both promptitude of decision and a readiness to face heavy losses, was foreign alike to the cautious character of General Joubert and to the constitution of the force which he commanded. With the deliberation which had marked the whole of their invasion of Natal, the Transvaalers confined themselves on October 31 to occupying the eastern edge of the Ladysmith plain, not so much in order to secure positions for a further offensive, as to utilize the immunity from attack thus assured in order to settle down in their laagers and discuss the situation in comfort. The Free Staters similarly settled down with their main body to the north-west of the town. That evening, however, General A. P. Cronje led out some 2,000 men of the Harrismith, Heilbron, Winburg and Vrede commandos, with two guns, and by a night march across the open plain west of Ladysmith established them in the hilly ground to the south-west, where they would be conveniently posted either to check an attempt on the part of the British to break out on that side, or to cross the hills and descend upon Colenso, into which place they in fact began to drop shells a few hours later.*

The investment decided upon.

On November 1 a joint council of war of the Transvaal and Free State commandants was held at Joubert's headquarters near Modderspruit siding. It was decided that the commandos should invest the town on all sides to prevent the escape of White's force, while their artillery carried on a bombardment which, it was confidently expected, would bring about a surrender before the end of many days. The different sections of the investing line were duly apportioned, gun positions were selected, and during the next few days the burghers busied themselves in putting their policy into execution. In this task they were not seriously disturbed

* See vol. ii., p. 300.

by the British, who were too pre-occupied with the task of strengthening their own defences to attempt to take advantage of the confidently negligent movements of the commandos. The cavalry reconnaissance of November 2 did, indeed, succeed in surprising the Winburgers at their breakfast, but the reconnaissance by the Imperial Light Horse on the 3rd, developing as it did into an inconsequent general engagement of Brocklehurst's whole brigade and Royston's volunteers on the hills south of Wagon Hill—known afterwards as Mounted Infantry Hill and Middle Hill—and in the "Long Valley" to the west of them,* only served to encourage the burghers, who greatly enjoyed shelling the British back into camp, and believed that they had, with the trifling casualties of one killed and a dozen or so wounded, repelled a determined attempt to break through the investing line.

Transvaal positions.

The positions taken up by the Transvaalers for the investment were, with small modifications, those in which they had camped on their first arrival, and from which they had fought on October 30. Joubert's headquarters were behind Long Hill, a little distance south of the railway siding at Modderspruit, which was now converted into an advanced base for the whole Transvaal force round Ladysmith and subsequently on the Tugela.† Here Mr. Krogh, the Transvaal commissary-general, established his supply park, and Lieutenant Paff, the energetic head of the military telegraphs, fixed the centre of the field communication bureaux, whence he and his assistants proceeded to link up all the laagers with a very complete field telegraph system. West of the railway, from Pepworth to Surprise Hill inclusive, separated from the British positions by the valley through which runs the Harrismith Railway, was General Erasmus's section held by the Pretoria commando, Van Dam's police, Blake's Irish corps, and Viljoen's Johannesburg commando, which had been reorganized since Elandslaagte and brought

* See vol. ii., p. 299.

† About the middle of November the Netherlands Railway successfully transported several small engines by ox-wagon to Nelthorpe, and ran a train daily between Nelthorpe and Colenso. A supply depôt and field bakery were subsequently created at the former place for the laagers south of Ladysmith and on the Tugela.

up to nearly 500 men—3,500 to 4,000 men in all. The centre of the Transvaal position was under Vice-President Schalk Burger, Joubert's acknowledged second-in-command, and was manned by some 6,000 to 6,500 burghers. The Lydenburgers and Swazilanders, with the burghers from Ermelo, Bethel, and Carolina, covered the headquarters camp. Behind Lombard's Kop and Lombard's Nek were the strong Middelburg and Heidelberg commandos. The southern section was held by Lukas Meyer, temporarily replaced by Louis Botha, with some 4,500 burghers. Wakkerstroom, Krugersdorp, and Standerton were securely camped behind Bulwana and its underfeature, Intabagone. Utrecht, Vryheid, and the Pretoria Germans, in the order named, held the ridges across the Klip River facing the plain and Cæsar's Camp, with their laagers in the valley of the Herman's Spruit.

Free State positions.

The rest of the circle was completed by some 7,000 or more Free Staters. The head laager under Martinus Prinsloo, with part of the Winburg commando, was at Smith's Crossing on the Harrismith Railway. The large Kroonstad commando, laagered in several camps, held the line eastwards to Thornhill's kopje adjoining the Pretorians on Surprise Hill, and south-westwards to the Sand Spruit, including the ridge crossed by the telegraph line from Ladysmith to the Free State and known to the besieged as Telegraph Hill. Bethlehem and Vrede held Rifleman's Ridge south of the road to Van Reenen's with Heilbron on their right. South of these again Harrismith held Lancer's Hill, commanding the road from Potgieter's Drift, and the Long Valley across to Middle Hill, while beyond them the burghers from Ventersburg and Winburg, on the extreme right, kept touch with Vryheid and the Germans on the Transvaal left. The whole series of these positions was admirably adapted to its purpose, which was not so much to facilitate the capture of Ladysmith as to prevent the escape of the garrison. The broad valleys round Ladysmith were as defensible from one side as from the other, and furnished the Boers with an outer circle of defences corresponding exactly to the perimeter held by the British garrison. By their dispositions the Boers, no less than Sir G. White, made all transition from the defensive

to the offensive difficult for themselves, and thus prepared the way for the long and weary stalemate of the siege.

Boer reliance on bombardment.

There was one offensive measure, however, in whose speedy and complete success the Boers placed an almost touching confidence, and that was the artillery bombardment. The available pieces of ordnance, some seventeen in all, increased afterwards to about twenty-two, were dragged up under Colonel Trichardt's directions on to the various heights commanding the town or the British defences. These included two 6-inch Creuzot "Long Toms," firing a 96-lb. projectile with an effective range of nearly 10,000 yards, and four 4·7-inch Krupp howitzers, firing a 34-lb. projectile with a range of over 6,000 yards. For the rest, the Boer siege artillery consisted of their ordinary Krupp or Creuzot field guns. A comparison of the gun power of besiegers and besieged is instructive, for it brings out the fact that, except in long-range weapons, the Boers were less than half as strong as the enemy whom they were attempting to reduce. This inferiority prevented their bringing their field guns into effective range, and threw practically the whole task of bombardment on the long-range guns. Even with a very small target and a carefully concentrated fire it would be difficult to hope for much result from the fire of half a dozen guns. Against a town of scattered houses and gardens and a series of positions fourteen miles in length, and with a fire directed at random, according to the fancy of the individual gunner, it was absurd to expect any result at all. But so elated were the Boers by the success of "Long Tom" in driving Yule out of Dundee, and by the more recent prowess of the Pepworth guns on October 30, that they attributed a well-nigh magical efficacy to the bombardment, convinced that it would force White into almost immediate surrender.

Nov. 2. Opening of the bombardment. The Intombi Camp.

The bombardment may be said to have begun on November 2, when the Creuzot on Pepworth opened a desultory fire first on the town and then on the naval 4·7, which had just been mounted on Junction Hill, one of its shells mortally wounding Lieutenant Egerton, R.N., in command of the gun. That same evening other guns joined in from Lombard's Nek, and on the 3rd and 4th the bombardment

increased in intensity as new guns were brought into position. Trifling as the fire was from the military point of view, it yet succeeded in thoroughly unnerving many of the civilians, and induced Mr. Farquhar, the mayor, to address Sir G. White on the subject of the removal of non-combatants, more especially of women and children, to some place of greater security. The principal medical officer also pointed out that the sick and wounded in the town hall, which had been converted into a hospital, were exposed to grave danger from the fire. The result was the opening up by White of negotiations with Joubert,* which resulted in an armistice till midnight on the 5th and the formation of a neutral camp for sick, wounded and non-combatants, at the southern end of the plain along the Intombi Spruit. Trains were run down to Intombi on the 5th, hospital tents pitched, and before the armistice expired most of the sick and wounded were transferred to the new camp. The majority of the civilian population refused to avail themselves of Joubert's terms. But a certain number came out in wagons with their belongings, and it is to be regretted that dozens of able-bodied men, who might have borne arms in defence of Ladysmith, accompanied these caravans. Still it should be remembered in their excuse that no attempt was made by White to enlist their services, and that, in fact, the existing town guard, 273 strong, was at that very moment being disbanded.† The camp was placed under the control

* See vol. ii., p. 300.

† The neglect to make use of the civilian population of Ladysmith is one of the most striking features of the siege. It is true that the town guard, to the strength of about 150 men, was renewed on December 12, and that in February some 900 men were enrolled from the railway employees, artisans and transport riders. But even then there were several hundred civilians on the ration-list who were of no service to the defence. The toleration of an idle and unwatched element in the town contributed to the general listlessness, and was probably responsible for such treachery as may conceivably have existed. As soon as Intombi Camp was formed—or, indeed, as soon as the war broke out—every able-bodied man should have been forced to take his place in the defences, or if serious doubt existed as to his loyalty, he should have been given the advantage of neutrality afforded by the gaol. The casualties up to October 30 and the captures of Elandslaagte would have made a sufficient supply of rifles available, and more were released by sickness every day.

of Mr. Bennett, the Resident Magistrate of Ladysmith, while Major Mapleton, R.A.M.C., was made responsible for the hospital arrangements. Under agreement with the besiegers, a daily train was allowed to ration the camp, provided it only made the journey in daylight. This remarkable act of clemency on Joubert's part was strongly opposed by Botha and other Boer commandants, and more than once in the later course of the siege the Boers endeavoured to find some pretext in order to go back upon their concession, which can, however, hardly be said to have injured them from the military point of view, except in so far as the presence of the sick and wounded would have contributed to depressing the spirits of the garrison.

Nov. 8. Boers decide on an attack.

The armistice was actively employed, alike by the British in strengthening their positions, and by the Boers in mounting and protecting their guns. With much labour the second "Long Tom," which now arrived from Lang's Nek, was dragged on to the summit of Bulwana, and on the morning of the 8th opened fire, at a range of 7,500 yards, from a projecting spur on the west side of the hill—to the great consternation of the Ladysmith staff, who had never anticipated such a feat of gun transportation, and now found many of their defences enfiladed or taken in rear by its far-ranging and terrifying projectiles. Meanwhile a week had passed since the opening of the bombardment, and to the surprise and chagrin of the Boers Ladysmith showed no signs of surrendering. A *Krygsraad* was held on the 8th, and it was agreed that the policy of investment should make way for one of active offence, which should place the Boers in possession of some point commanding the town and the British positions at closer range. The obvious key of the whole position was the great ridge of Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill, known to the Boers as the "Platrand" or "flat ridge," which, with its northern underfeature, Maiden's Castle, completely dominated the whole of the town and of the western defences at from 2,000 to 5,000 yards range. Another point, known to be weakly held and unintrenched, whose occupation would seriously cramp the defences of the garrison, was Observation Hill, a ridge some 1,700 yards in

front of Cove Redoubt, and separated by a valley only 1,400 yards across from the bush-grown plateau of Bell's Kopje, held by Van Dam's "Zarps." It was decided not to waste a single day, but to capture the Platrand and Observation Hill by a sudden attack that very night. The commandos along the sections opposite these points were warned to start soon after midnight; the rest were to support or assist by a demonstration in the morning under cover of a grand bombardment. Late at night the attack on Cæsar's Camp was suddenly countermanded. Joubert, left to himself, had reconsidered the plan, and thought this part of it too venturesome. The rest of the plan held good, and at 1.30 A.M. on the 9th Field-Cornet Zeederberg's section of the Pretorians left their laager and established themselves by daybreak in a donga within 800 yards from Observation Hill. Had they come a little earlier and pushed on at once they could have occupied the hill itself without opposition.

Nov. 9. Failure of the attack on Observation Hill.

At 5 A.M. all the Boer guns began the artillery preparation for the attack, that is to say, they dropped their missiles into the town, the tin camp, or on to different points of the defences, according to the gunners' fancy. An hour later the squadron of the 5th Lancers, which, as usual, took up its position on Observation Hill at daybreak, was heavily fired at by the Pretorians, who were now advancing from the donga. Two companies of the Rifle Brigade were sent forward in support from Leicester Post, being shelled in rear from Bulwana as they reached the hill, and forced by this fire to send forward their exposed supports in order to prolong the more sheltered firing-line! The advance of the Pretorians had already been checked by the fire of the Lancers, who had held their ground manfully, and the Riflemen now effectually drove back the Boer supports, who were coming on from Bell's Kopje in considerable numbers but with no great resolution. Firing was heavy all day, but the attack was never pressed, though a small party of the Pretorians remained till dusk in the donga, and even behind rocks and ant-hills some distance in front of it.

Demonstrations against

On the south side Joubert had intended that there should be nothing more than a demonstration. But the Vryheid

Cæsar's Camp and other points.

burghers, acting on their own initiative, endeavoured to convert this into an actual attack, and securing a lodgment in the bush-grown underfeatures of Cæsar's Camp, and in the valley between it and Wagon Hill, pushed forward with some vigour about 10 A.M., being supported by a hot fire from Mounted Infantry Hill and from other points in the valley of the Fourie's Spruit. But the Manchesters, who had been strengthened by the arrival of the 42nd Battery, and by some 130 of the Imperial Light Horse, who occupied Wagon Hill, replied strenuously, and the attack soon died away into an exchange of long distance rifle-fire. Even feebler was a half-hearted demonstration made somewhat later in the day against the positions of the Devons and Liverpools on the eastern half of Knox's section. By mid-day Sir G. White was so satisfied that he had nothing to fear from the attack that he was able to indulge in the pleasantry of firing a salute of twenty-one guns in honour of the Prince of Wales's birthday. Artillery and rifle-firing went on till evening put an end to this tamest of sequels to the bold resolutions formed by the Boers on the previous day. The total casualties of the day were 4 killed and 27 wounded on the British side and probably about the same on that of the Boers. The direct result of this affair was that White's attention was drawn to two particularly vulnerable portions of his defences, and from this date Observation Hill, and eventually Wagon Hill (as distinct from Cæsar's Camp), were included in the perimeter and scheme of defences. The former was permanently occupied and partially put in a state of defence by four companies of the 60th, relieved on alternate nights by the Rifle Brigade, and the latter by two squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse, subsequently reinforced by three companies of the 60th. The moral effect upon the staff and the garrison generally of the weakness of the Boer attack was excellent, and did much to remove the depression which had weighed upon the whole force since the battle of the 30th.

Boers relapse into inactivity.

As for the Boers the effect of their fiasco, though it disgusted a few of the more courageous or more far-seeing, was to strengthen the majority in their aversion to risking

their lives in an assault, when the same result could be gained so much more safely and comfortably by sitting down and waiting. Their expectations of speedy results from the bombardment were no longer so high as at first; but, on the other hand, the reports of Kaffirs, caught in trying to make their way out, now led them to hope that famine and disease were already working fearful havoc with the garrison, and that the end could not be very far off. Meanwhile, as a concession to the clamour of the party of action, an expedition was organized for the invasion of Natal south of the Tugela,* and the first step taken in that reduction of the investing force which was gradually to bring it down to a mere skeleton of 5,000 to 6,000 men. Joubert himself accompanied the expedition to insure its being conducted with due caution, leaving the command at Ladysmith in the hands of Schalk Burger, in whose firm adherence to a policy of running no risks he felt a confidence fully justified by the event. Many burghers, too, now began to go away on leave, their numbers, though not their fighting value, being to some extent made up by the constant stream of visitors—officials, ladies, foreign consuls, and others—who came down from Johannesburg and Pretoria to picnic with the gunners on Bulwana or Gun Hill, and to watch them doing terrible execution on the hapless town of Ladysmith. The rest proceeded to make themselves as comfortable as possible and to await events.

Nov. 14. Reconnaissance to Rifleman's Ridge.

The departure of the Estcourt expedition on November 13 did not pass unobserved by the British outposts, and, encouraged by this and by the inactivity of the Boers since the 9th, White determined to essay a more active policy. On the 14th Brocklehurst went out with the 5th Lancers, 19th Hussars, two squadrons each of the Imperial Light Horse and Border Mounted Rifles, and the 21st and 67th Batteries, with instructions to turn the enemy off Rifleman's Ridge. The Imperial Light Horse established themselves on Star Hill, north-east of Rifleman's Ridge, and the rest of the force endeavoured to work round by Field's Farm. The Boers on the ridge, some 400 Vrede and Bethlehem burghers,

* See vol. ii., p. 303 *sqq.*

defended themselves vigorously, while three Boer guns joined in from different points. The British guns expended a great deal more shell than could be afforded for anything but a decisive operation, but no attempt was made to push home an attack which, in the opinion of spectators from Wagon Hill, might easily have succeeded, and early in the afternoon Brocklehurst withdrew. His withdrawal was a signal for a hot shell-fire, in which Bulwana joined as the retreating force came within range.

Remaining incidents of November.

From this date to the end of the month no incidents of great importance occurred to break the monotony of the investment. If the Boers did little to effect the reduction of the garrison, the garrison did less to render the investment difficult and troublesome to the besiegers. Even sniping expeditions, a form of activity most useful in keeping up the spirits of a beleaguered force and in worrying their beleaguerers, were strictly discountenanced by Sir G. White. The bombardment continued as aimlessly as before. On the 14th, and for a night or two after, the Boers fired a few rounds from their big guns in the middle of the night, a most harassing manœuvre, but one which they were too indolent to keep up. On the 23rd a single shell from Bulwana killed and wounded eleven men of the Liverpools on Junction Hill. On the 24th the Boer guns on Rifleman's Ridge and Telegraph Hill stampeded a herd of 228 oxen, and, by a series of shells cleverly planted just beyond them, successfully shepherded them into their own lines.

Disputes about Intombi.

The direct result of this incident was the reduction of the Ladysmith meat ration on the 25th. During these days, by General Burger's direct orders, shell-fire was concentrated on the town hall, which was used as a hospital for less serious cases and was flying the red cross flag, apparently on the ground that, with a hospital already at Intombi, the British could only be using the red cross in the town to cover some illegitimate purpose, such as the storage of ammunition. By the end of the month White was compelled to move the hospital from the town hall to a ravine out of the line of fire. The whole attitude, indeed, of the Boers with regard to Intombi Camp gave evidence of their

change of temper with regard to the siege. On December 3 Joubert sent in a peremptory order that the camp was to be abolished, as its privileges were abused for military purposes. White took up a firm attitude on the subject, and eventually the affair was amicably arranged after a meeting between Schalk Burger and Sir A. Hunter. Before this White had been compelled to take a firm line with Burger, who, on November 25, attempted to send into the town 230 British-Indian refugees from the Transvaal. White had previously taken in the Dundee wounded and some 200 refugee coolies from that place, but so barefaced an attempt to weaken his powers of resistance by imposing on his humanity was too much. When pressed Burger conceded the point and allowed the Indians to go south.

Changes in Boer artillery positions. Attempt to blow up Sunday River Bridge.

On November 27 the Boers unmasked a third 6-inch Creuzot on Middle Hill, bringing Wagon Hill and Cæsar's Camp under fire at a damaging range. To meet this new development the two old howitzers on Devonshire Post were removed by night and mounted on the nek between Wagon Hill and its extreme spur, Wagon Point. They set to work to such good effect on the 30th that, in a few rounds, they completely mastered the fire of the "Long Tom," a lucky shot killing and wounding nine of the gunners and damaging the gun. It was withdrawn during the night to reappear on December 11 on Telegraph Hill, whereupon the howitzers were sent round to Ration Post. At the increased range (4,000 yards) they were less successful, and never managed completely to silence it, and to the end of the siege it continued to shell the tin camp and northern defences. About the same time the Boer gunners became dissatisfied with Pepworth Hill as an artillery position, and moved the "Long Tom" which had been there to Gun Hill. Searchlights were now put up by Lieutenant Paff on Telegraph Hill and Bulwana mainly with the object of guarding against surprises. On the British side almost the only minor active measure undertaken at this time was the sending out one night of a locomotive containing some explosives up the Harrismith line in the hope that it might run into something. It successfully ran into the veld, where it overturned and

gasped out its breath, its fate providing the garrison with food for many humorous sallies at the expense of the staff. More to the point was a gallant attempt on the 29th by Mr. Sydney Thorrold, a young local farmer, and Conductor Malcolm, A.S.C., to blow up the railway bridge over the Sunday River. The bold pair got through the Boer lines, fixed the gun-cotton charges, and only missed success owing to their ignorance of how to connect the fuses.

Nov. 29. Abortive attack on Rifleman's Ridge. Spy-mania.

That same night (29th) White had arranged for the carrying out of a more ambitious operation with the idea of extending his perimeter and, if possible, creating a gap in the investing lines in order to be free to co-operate with the relieving force now at Frere. This was the capture and permanent occupation of Rifleman's Ridge. At the last moment, to his surprise and annoyance, he received reports from his outposts that the Boers on that side had been very strongly reinforced just before sunset. He accordingly countermanded the attack. Spy-mania rather dominated the minds of the Ladysmith staff throughout the siege, and White now at once jumped to the conclusion that his plans had been betrayed, a conclusion which in his message to Buller next day he couched in the form of a general statement: "Enemy learns every plan of operations I form." As a matter of fact, Boer information about what went on in Ladysmith throughout the siege was non-existent, or was confined to what could be picked up by the examination of captured Kaffir runners or from the perusal of private letters and of descriptive articles by newspaper correspondents occasionally captured with them. Indeed, on their side the Boers were no less convinced than White himself that their laagers were swarming with British spies, and saw a proof of their conviction in the simplest of coincidences.

Simultaneous abortive attack on Cæsar's Camp.

The real reason of the massing of men behind Rifleman's Ridge was something quite unconnected with any information or surmise as to White's intentions. The return of Joubert and of the Estcourt expedition on the 27th was followed by a general *Krygsraad* for the discussion of the situation. The party of action once more asserted itself. They pointed out that the commandos round Ladysmith had

recently been seriously weakened in order to reinforce the Free Staters opposed to Methuen,* that the approach of the relieving force to Colenso would necessitate a still further withdrawal of troops, and that something must therefore be done while there were yet men available to do it. "Something," of course, meant the capture of Cæsar's Camp, and under the influence of their earnest eloquence the *Krygsraad* once again decided that the key to Ladysmith must be taken by storm, and fixed the early morning of the 30th for the enterprise. On the afternoon of the 29th the Transvaal and Free State commandos to whom the task was assigned took up preliminary positions —behind Rifleman's Ridge and elsewhere—in readiness to start for the assault at 2 A.M. While thus waiting the commandants and field-cornets had leisure to think over the task before them. Thinking aroused the desire for consultation, and at 10 P.M. an informal council of war was held in Fighting-General de Villiers's tent in the Harrismith laager. The more they discussed the attack the less they liked it, and by one o'clock they had satisfactorily convinced one another that it was an impossibility, and that the best thing to be done was to go to bed. The Boer gunners opened vigorously at daybreak, but soon discovered that nothing had occurred, and the rest of the day passed off with the usual aimless bombardment. But it is interesting to speculate what might have happened if the two night-attacks had coincided.

White's communications with Buller, and offers of co-operation. Nov. 10–30.

All this time Ladysmith had been in intermittent touch with the outside world by native runners. Maps of Ladysmith and the surrounding country, photographically reduced, were sent down to Maritzburg by carrier pigeons, and in this way Major Altham, White's A.A.G. for Intelligence, was able to give substantial help to the forces collecting south of the Tugela. On November 10 White sent a message † to Buller urging that Clery should move up to Colenso as soon as possible, and offering to help to open a road for him *viâ*

* See vol. ii., p. 385.

† See evidence of Sir G. White and Sir R. Buller before the War Commission, 14838, 14866, 14963, etc.

Onderbroek,* an offer defined in a subsequent message to Clery by the limitation that he could not go out far to meet him. The same offer was repeated in a message of the 26th, and on the 27th White announced his intention of harassing the commandos that were now being withdrawn to oppose Methuen, and of breaking a gap in the Boer line—a scheme which, as we have already seen, he abandoned owing to the coincidence of the Boer reinforcement of Rifleman's Ridge. Before this, measures had been taken for the formation of a striking force† to co-operate with the relieving column as soon as the latter should come within reasonable distance. On the 30th, in answer to Buller's inquiries, White announced that he still had seventy days' provisions and could hold Ladysmith while they lasted. He further volunteered the information that he could give most help to a force coming by Onderbroek Hotel or Springfield. He was too completely invested to be able to "go large" before the pressure on him was taken off by the advance, and would therefore reserve himself "for one or two big efforts to co-operate with the relief force." In these and other messages White, while apologizing, as it were, for not being able to play a bolder part with his force at once, made clear his anxiety to co-operate with the relievers as soon as the latter should have really got to work. Beyond indicating the probable date of his advance, Buller, influenced possibly by White's remarks about the leakage of information to the enemy, vouchsafed no order or suggestion of any sort in reply.

White allows more active measures.

Meanwhile, apart from the more ambitious policy deprecated by White, there was much that he could do—and might, indeed, have done before—to keep the Boers round Ladysmith busy and apprehensive, and so to prevent their withdrawing men to oppose Buller on the Tugela. The time was ripe for

* *I.e.*, Onderbroek Hotel at the head of the Grobelaar's Kloof Valley, just beyond the southern end of Long Valley.

† Besides the mounted troops this mobile column was to include the Gordons, Devons, Rifle Brigade, and half the Manchesters, with Coxhead's brigade division R.F.A. (21st, 42nd, 53rd). These arrangements necessitated the withdrawal of the Devons from the works flanking the Helpmakaar Road, where their place was taken by the Liverpools.

MAJOR-GENERAL
J. F. BROCKLEHURST, C.V.O., C.B.,
COMMANDING 2ND CAVALRY BRIGADE (NATAL F.F.).
Photo by Pedersen, Copenhagen.

MAJOR-GENERAL
SIR F. HOWARD, K.C.B., C.M.G., A.D.C.,
COMMANDING 8TH INFANTRY BRIGADE.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR W. G. KNOX, K.C.B., R.H.A.,
COMMANDING "A" SECTION LADYSMITH DEFENCES
LATER 23RD INFANTRY BRIGADE.
Photo by Werner & Son.

some show of activity by the garrison, and White, still somewhat reluctantly, began to listen to suggestions from his subordinates for minor enterprises, against which he had hitherto set his face so rigidly. On the night of December 5, Captain Gough, of the Rifle Brigade, attempted to surprise a Boer picket at Thornhill's Farm, which, however, was unfortunately absent. On the 7th Colonel Knox was instructed to take out a small force that night and harass the enemy at Limit Hill and further along the Newcastle Road. Knox reported to Hunter that there were no Boers within reach in that direction, and suggested as an alternative an attack on Gun Hill, which, since the removal to it of the Pepworth Creuzot, had made itself very obnoxious to Knox's section. Hunter took up the idea warmly, and with some difficulty Sir G. White's sanction was secured on condition that Hunter personally conducted the expedition and that at least 500 men accompanied him. Hunter selected as his companions in this bold enterprise 100 of the Imperial Light Horse and 400 of Royston's Volunteers, entrusting the guidance of the force to Major David Henderson and his corps of guides.* Knox, whose previous orders still held good, was to cover the left flank of the sortie.

Dec. 7–8. Gun Hill sortie.

Preparations were made with the utmost secrecy, and at 10.15 P.M. the little force started from Devonshire Post, marching along the road that leads round the northern slope of Gun Hill and Lombard's Kop. There was a Boer picket, of whose existence Henderson was well aware, on a small spur where the road ran close under Gun Hill. Before coming to this the force halted. Leaving 100 of the Border Mounted Rifles across the road to guard the left flank, and sending Royston with the main body of his Volunteers to the right to check any counter-attack from Lombard's Nek, Hunter, with the storming party, the Imperial Light Horse and 100 Natal Volunteers of different corps, struck straight across the stony, donga-intersected thorn scrub for the middle of Gun Hill. Arriving at the foot of the hill at 2 A.M., the assaulting

* See vol. ii., p. 131. Henderson had that same day obtained permission to take fifty men to attack a Boer gun on the western side, but this was now countermanded in favour of the bigger enterprise.

column deployed into line: the Light Horse, under Colonel A. H. M. Edwards and Major Karri Davies, on the left; the Natalians, under Major Addison, on the right. Then the ascent of the 250 feet of steep boulder-strewn slope began. Slowly and steadily the men scrambled up what seemed an endless black wall of perpendicular rock. Suddenly from the darkness to their left rear came a faint uncertain challenge—"*Wie daar?*"—repeated again and again, and then, with a sudden realization of what was happening, rising into an agonized cry of warning to the sentry on the summit: "*Schiet, Stephanus, hier kom de verdomde rooineks, schiet, schiet!*" With that the whole picket fired wildly into the rear of the assaulting line, who only clambered on with silent, desperate energy. They were now within twenty paces of the summit. A fringe of fire broke out along the crest. The defenders had waited for them. A few men began to reply. But the officers stopped them, and then Edwards's voice rang out clear—"Fix bayonets!" There were no bayonets, but taking up the cry, the men rushed the skyline. The thought of the cold steel was too much for the Boer gunners, who fled into the darkness. At the head of his men, Edwards groped his way across the plateau to the battery, annexing "Long Tom" in the name of the Imperial Light Horse. The 4·7 howitzer was found soon after, and then Captain Fowke and Lieutenant Turner, with a few sappers, inserted the gun-cotton charges into the breech and muzzle of the guns, while the stormers withdrew below the crest. Then followed the explosion, leaving the guns wrecked—irreparably destroyed, thought the sappers; but they had yet to reckon with the resources of the Pretoria repairing shops.* Hunter called for three cheers for the Queen, and then the descent began, the men taking with them as trophies the breech-block of the 6-inch gun and a colt gun, and many other articles found in the battery. The return journey was unmolested. The total

* "Long Tom" was repaired within three weeks, and, with shortened muzzle and a new breech, was sent off to help in the siege of Kimberley. The howitzer was beyond repair, but Mr. Uggla, of the railway works, succeeded in making an exact reproduction of it.

casualties were seven wounded, including Major Henderson, to whose leading the success of this most gallant enterprise was so largely due.

Failure of the cavalry sortie.

Meanwhile at 11 P.M. Knox had taken out three companies of the Liverpools with a company of mounted infantry and a squadron of the 19th Hussars, and after occupying Limit Hill had advanced up the Newcastle Road almost to the foot of Pepworth without coming across any Boers; the Hussars in fact pushed on far enough to destroy the telegraph wire leading from Lombard's Kop to the head laager at Modder Spruit. At 3 A.M. he sent back a message to headquarters suggesting that the cavalry brigade should seize the opportunity for a sortie. Had arrangements been made by the staff for a possible co-operation by the cavalry, and the latter consequently been ready to act on Knox's report, Joubert's laager could almost certainly have been surprised, or even captured. As it was the cavalry did not move out till 7 A.M., by which time the Boers were everywhere on the alert. The squadrons spread out in different directions, but were soon stopped, and were eventually hunted back under cover of Knox's section by a vigorous shell and rifle-fire, having lost three killed and fifteen wounded. That same night (7th–8th) an attempt was made to carry out a scheme, based on reconnaissances by Lieutenant McTaggart, 5th Lancers, for surprising a Boer party in a farm near the foot of Bell's Kopje. Colonel Carleton took out five companies of the Leicesters and surrounded the farm, but found the Boers had departed.

Dec. 10-11. Surprise Hill sortie.

Encouraged by the successful issue of the Gun Hill sortie, Colonel Metcalfe asked and received permission to take out the Rifle Brigade on the 10th to destroy a particularly venomous 4·7 in. howitzer which had been pounding all the northern posts from Surprise Hill.* At 10 P.M. five companies of the Rifle Brigade moved out of camp behind King's Post. Colonel Metcalfe was in command, accompanied by Major Wing, R.A., the guides

* He had assured himself of the possibility of this scheme by a reconnaissance on the previous night, accompanied by Major Wing, R.A., who had been quartered in Ladysmith before the war, and knew the ground.

Thornhill and Ashby, and by Lieutenant Digby Jones, R.E., in charge of the blasting detachment. The moon was not due to set till midnight, so Metcalfe was only able to take his men to a donga about a mile outside the perimeter, where they halted to wait for darkness. It was a weird, dramatic pause for the partakers in the bold venture. The moonbeams bathed in a flood of white the miles of veld which stretch away to the west of the Ladysmith defences. All seemed so still and peaceful that it was impossible to realize that the scene was set in the midst of war—that in a few short hours the beautiful calm of the night was to be broken by the rude shock of mortal strife. The fascination of the surroundings was enhanced at intervals by the faint flicker of a flashlight on the broken clouds. They were signalling from the relief column, twenty miles away. Then a harsher light would disturb the serenity of the scene. A garish beam would shine out from the enemy's position on Telegraph Hill. It would dance along the fringe of the town defences; peer fixedly at every suspected exit; then flash suddenly to the clouds to obliterate the message from the south; then in wavering method search timidly along the plain. But the little Riflemen lay snugly in the nullah. The great beam went about its business and left them undiscovered. At times there would be a rifle-shot in the distance, and perhaps a burst of firing as some picket along the far line of defences imagined itself disturbed. But with the assaulting party all was still as death.

Capture of the hill.

Just before midnight the moon was lost in an ominous bank of cloud fringing the distant Drakensberg range. The time for action had arrived. Silently the five companies of Riflemen filed out of the nullah and began slowly and steadily to pick their way across the uneven surface of the plain. Leaving half a company to protect their left as they crossed the Harrismith Railway, and another on their right in a donga under the shadow of Bell's Kopje, they moved on, every moment expecting to stumble on a picket, but finding none. Fortune was on their side, for till a few days before a rise half a mile in front of Surprise Hill had been occupied nightly by a strong picket. But Viljoen, who was

responsible for that sub-section of the perimeter, had been withdrawn to the Upper Tugela, and his successor had not seen fit to continue his precautions. By 2 A.M. the foot of the hill was reached. Here B and G companies were halted and formed outwards to support A and H, which furnished the assaulting line. The ascent now began, the boots and rifles of the men clattering audibly on the loose boulders of the slope. Yet it was not till the leading section was almost on the brow of the hill that the challenge came, and with it a burst of fire from the *brandwacht* on the left shoulder of the hill. Heedless of the fire the Riflemen swarmed over the crest-line. The battery was found in a few seconds, but for a moment the men thought their prize had been removed, till they unearthed it, covered with a tarpaulin, just outside the emplacement. The men were thrown out in a semicircle while the preparations for the destruction of the gun were made. When all was ready the party retired over the edge. But something went amiss with the fuze and Digby Jones returned to place another. This time all went well,* and after a ringing cheer the men started stumbling and slipping down the slope.

Boer counter-attack.

At the first outbreak of fire a Boer gunner on Bell's Kopje fired off a round to give the alarm, and in a few minutes the Transvaalers on that side, and the Free Staters on Thornhill's Kopje, streamed out of their laagers, and began firing blindly and furiously at the hill slope from both flanks. Through this fire, enveloping them at closer range every moment, the men scrambled down. Suddenly a ring of flame blazed forth at their very feet. A party of some twenty Pretorians, mostly young lawyers and business men, had boldly come round the side of the hill and, regardless of the heavy fire from their own side, had lain down in a line across the slope ready to intercept the storming party, of whose numbers they probably had no idea. A moment's hesitation on the part of the British might have marked the beginning of another "unfortunate incident." But with implicit obedience to Metcalfe's instructions, and disregarding the

* This howitzer, too, was repaired, but before that, on December 20, its place on Surprise Hill was taken by another.

misleading orders shouted out by the Boers, the men charged forward in grim silence. The gallant handful of Pretorians wildly emptied their magazines in the vain endeavour to stay the rush, and then the Riflemen surged into and over them, killing or wounding several with their bayonets as they passed. From the foot of the hill the men, as arranged, made their way back as best they could under the lee of Observation Hill, getting home to camp by dawn. The casualties, 14 killed or mortally wounded, including Lieutenant Fergusson, and 50 wounded, were not excessive for a feat so gallantly and successfully performed.

Indignation in Pretoria.

The success of the sorties had a most inspiriting effect on the garrison, which was beginning to feel the depressing influence of inactive isolation. One can only regret that several attempts were not made simultaneously on the first night against all the principal Boer guns, and that similar attempts, on a larger or smaller scale, were not constantly repeated during the opening weeks of the siege. Quite apart from the military advantage of harassing the enemy, their effect as a stimulating influence would have saved more men from enteric than they would have cost the garrison in casualties. To the besiegers, who had gradually become more and more careless in the carrying out of those military precautions which are essential in the face of even the most inactive of opponents, the sorties were a severe shock. The indignation in Pretoria over the Gun Hill affair was intense. The government censured General Burger, who, owing to Joubert's illness, was in command, and Burger held a court-martial, by which Commandant Weilbach of Heidelberg and Major Erasmus of the Artillery were for the time being suspended from their commands. The second sortie added to this indignation and lent colour to the suggestion now made that the unfortunate sentries—men of English names, as it happened—had been guilty of deliberate treachery. They were arrested and sent to Pretoria, but eventually released.

White's preparations to help Buller.

The time appointed by Buller for the beginning of the relieving movement was now drawing near, and with it White's hopes of achieving some really effective stroke in the way of co-operation steadily grew. On December 9 Buller

announced that he would start for Potgieter's on the 12th and would reach Lancer's Hill, on the western edge of Long Valley, by the 17th. On the 11th, on the ground of being uncertain as to dates, he suggested that White should not attempt co-operation before he himself got to Lancer's Hill, unless he felt absolutely sure as to Buller's whereabouts. On the 13th the Potgieter's route was abandoned for Colenso and Onderbroek Spruit and the date for the move postponed to the 17th. Impressing upon his chief the all-importance of time as a factor in co-operation and the necessity of keeping him informed of any change of plans, White set about his preparations. The mobile column was again brought into being. To free some of Royston's mounted troops for this work the town guard was once more embodied on the 12th. Some of the artillery was brought into camp from the defences, while a naval 4·7-inch gun and a 12-pounder were transferred from the northern defences to Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill, with the idea that they might prove useful by covering Long Valley. Arrangements were made for the feeding of Buller's force and the care of a large number of wounded. The special field force created by White's order of the 14th, which he intended to lead out in person, included almost all the best troops in Ladysmith, and left the merest skeleton of about four battalions, one battery, a cavalry regiment, and a few Natal volunteers to Colonel Knox for the defence of the town. For the first time since October 30, White was determined to strike a blow with all the weight he could put into it.

Colenso and Buller's message.

On the 15th Ladysmith woke to the noise of the battling on the Tugela, but it was some time before White realized, from the heliograms coming in, that Buller had anticipated the date fixed for the attack by two days without giving him warning. Even then—however much he may have felt the lack of confidence shown in the withholding of information so important, and the slightness of the value apparently assigned to his co-operation—White may have thought that Buller had good reasons for not calling in his aid till he had secured a footing across the river.* Assuredly the summons

* See vol. ii., p. 439.

to action would come in the morning. The message came, bewildering, inexplicable; its abject hopelessness and craven counsel suggesting a counterfeit by men who knew nothing of the spirit of a British soldier. How that amazing message was sent, how it was answered, has already been related.*

* See vol. ii., p. 459 *sqq.* As the actual text of the messages has now been made public it is here reproduced:

Buller to White. No. 88 Cipher, 16th December:—"I tried Colenso yesterday, but failed; the enemy is too strong for my force, except with siege operations, and those will take one full month to prepare. Can you last so long? If not, how many days can you give me in which to take up defensive positions? After which I suggest your firing away as much ammunition as you can, and making best terms you can. I can remain here if you have alternative suggestion, but, unaided, I cannot break in. I find my infantry cannot fight more than ten miles from camp, and then only if water can be got, and it is scarce here.—Buller."

Buller to White. No. 92 Cipher, 16th December:—"My message, No. 88 Cipher. Groups 31 to 43 were correctly sent, but in place of them, and first number of 44 group, read as follows: 'How many days can you hold out?' Also add to the end of message: 'Whatever happens, recollect to burn your cipher and decipher and code books, and any deciphered messages.'—Buller."

White to Buller:—"Your No. 88 of to-day received and understood. My suggestion is that you take up strongest available position that will enable you to keep touch of the enemy and harass him constantly with artillery fire, and in other ways as much as possible. I can make food last for much longer than a month, and will not think of making terms till I am forced to. You may have hit enemy harder than you think. All our native spies report that your artillery fire made considerable impression on enemy. Have your losses been very heavy? If you lose touch of enemy, it will immensely increase his opportunities of crushing me, and have worst effect elsewhere. While you are in touch with him, and in communication with me, he has both of our forces to reckon with. Make every effort to get reinforcements as early as possible, including India, and enlist every man in both Colonies who will serve and can ride. Things may look brighter. The loss of 12,000 men here would be a heavy blow to England. We must not think of it. I fear I could not cut my way to you. Enteric fever is increasing alarmingly here. There are now 180 cases, all within last month. Answer fully; I am keeping everything secret for the present till I know your plans."

For a detailed study of these telegrams the reader should consult the evidence given by Sir G. White and Sir R. Buller before the War Commission. As to the explanations of his conduct there set forth by Sir R. Buller, a detailed examination of them would be beyond the scope of the present work, whose general conclusions are unaffected by them. Their interest, in any case, is psychological rather than strictly historical.

On the 17th, in reply to a feeble appeal to him to suggest some policy to his superior, White could only urge a renewal of the attempt to relieve Ladysmith at the earliest opportunity, and announce that he would do all he could to maintain an active defence and when the time came to co-operate to the extent of his power.

Situation at the close of the year.

The besieged garrison, ignorant of the inner story of Colenso, received the news with some depression, relieved by the cheerful tone of White's manly order, and by a calm consideration of the position. The defences had now been perfected and seemed practically secure against attack. Sickness was the worst enemy. There was food yet, which with economy could keep body and soul together for at least two months. The most serious anxiety that existed at the moment was for the welfare of the horses. The supply of hard forage was almost exhausted. In fact, in this respect the turning-point in the condition of the garrison had arrived. Up to December 15 it might have been used as a mobile force, operating from its intrenched positions; after this date it gradually ceased to be anything but a garrison to the perimeter it held. From December 15 to the end of the year but little occurred. The inconveniences of a siege were, however, brought home to the garrison more severely than heretofore. Supplies had to be husbanded, and the scale of rations was reduced all round. The Boer artillery practice improved somewhat, and there was an increase in the casualties from this cause. Sir George White was forced to change his headquarters owing to the damaging fire concentrated upon his house, which lent some colour to the suspicion that the Boer gunners on Bulwana had information supplied to them from within the perimeter. Christmastide was not marked by any special development. Few of the festivities which mark the season throughout the Christian world were possible; but an impressive service was held on Cæsar's Camp by the Rev. J. G. W. Tuckey, Army chaplain, and in the evening Colonel Frank Rhodes, Colonel Dartnell, Major Doveton, and Major Karri Davies gave a Christmas party to the children of the garrison, an incident of pathetic interest amid the privations and anxieties of the siege.

CHAPTER VIII

CÆSAR'S CAMP AND WAGON HILL

The Boers again decide to assault the Platrand. Jan. 2.

THE New Year marked no immediate change in the conditions of the investment, which was now entering upon its third month. But for the Boers that very absence of change was the most serious feature of the military situation. In spite of the efforts of the officers at the front to restrict the "leave-plague," and of the magistrates at home to beat up the laggards, it was becoming more and more difficult to keep up the commandos at full strength. Large drafts were already being withdrawn from Ladysmith to save Colesberg from French's victorious grasp. The steady reinforcement of Buller's camps at Chieveley and Frere pointed to an early renewal of the attempt to force the line of the Tugela, while, in the background, the menace of fresh troops from every part of the British Empire, and of a new commander-in-chief, was daily growing more distinct. With these dangers looming ahead, the siege could not be allowed to go on indefinitely; something must be done to set free for more serious work the commandos now laagered in idleness round the investing perimeter. Thus argued the bolder spirits and clearer heads in the laagers, and under their influence the discontent with Joubert's policy of inaction grew steadily. Once more the everlasting attack upon the Platrand came to the fore, and this time its advocates were successful in securing the influence of both Steyn and Kruger in favour of their plan. Reluctantly Joubert yielded to the pressure put upon him from above and from below, and on January 2 convoked a general *Krygsraad*, which, after a long and heated discussion, decided by a substantial majority in favour of the attack.

Dispositions for the attack.

The plan adopted was substantially the same as that which had failed of its execution on the two previous occasions. The great ridge was to be assaulted along its whole length of front and on its flanks, while a vigorous attack on Observation Hill, on the opposite side of the town, and a general demonstration along the whole perimeter, were to keep the British occupied and prevent troops from being withdrawn to reinforce the Platrand. The details of the plan were, however, worked out with much greater care than before, and an attempt was made to provide for a really effective concentration of force. Something like 5,000 men in all were to take part in the main operation. Of these 2,000 were considered sufficient for the actual storming party, who were to seize the crest-line of the hill before daylight, while the rest reinforced according as the situation developed. The eastern and south-eastern end of Cæsar's Camp was to be stormed by 900 men selected from the Heidelberg, Wakkerstroom, Standerton, Krugersdorp and Utrecht commandos, while 600 men of the Vryheid and German commandos were to attack along the southern face. Besides the rest of these commandos, who were to support from the bed of the Fourie's Spruit, a special reserve of 600 men under Louis Botha was to come up from Colenso to be thrown in when an emergency arose. Schalk Burger was to be in general command of the Transvaal attack. The Winburgers were to climb the main southern slope of Wagon Hill, while 400 of the Harrismith, Heilbron and Kroonstad commandos were to seize Wagon Point and the south-western end of Wagon Hill. The Free State supports were to concentrate behind Mounted Infantry Hill and in the bed of the Flagstaff Spruit, from which latter place a strong mounted force was to make a dash for the reverse of Wagon Hill as soon as the storming party were on the crest, in order to cut off the British retreat and prevent the arrival of reinforcements. For artillery support the attackers would have the enfilading fire of the 6-inch Creuzots on Bulwana and Telegraph Hill directed against the eastern and western ends of the ridge, while the transfer of five or six guns, including a howitzer and two field guns from Colenso, to various points on the

southern side of Bester's Valley would enable a fairly effective shell-fire to be distributed over the whole length of the summit. The actual date of the attack was left to be fixed by Joubert at short notice, to prevent Ladysmith being apprised in time by any of the British spies with whom the Boers believed their laagers to be swarming. The plan was not ill-conceived. Everything, however, depended upon the spirit in which it was executed, and more especially upon the success of the storming party in dislodging the British from the crest. That this crest was weakly held and only partially intrenched was known to the Boers, and they confidently expected that with its capture the whole Platrand, and eventually Ladysmith, would fall into their hands.

Character of Hamilton's defences.

Mention has already been made of the weakness of the southern section of the Ladysmith defences, the longest and, in some respects, most exposed of the whole perimeter. At the outset of the investment General Ian Hamilton had found himself responsible for holding a front of about five miles with barely 1,000 men. With this force the construction of a continuous line of fortifications along his whole front, such as existed on the northern side of the town, or even the manning of such a line when constructed, were out of the question. An entirely different defensive policy was called for by the different conditions. The solution of the problem which commended itself to Hamilton was to place at intervals strong closed forts, so posted that each could command both a clear field of fire in front and across the space between it and the forts on either side, and that it could be easily reinforced from Ladysmith. In the absence of overwhelming artillery fire such an arrangement was not less effective by day, and much safer at night, than a thinly held continuous line of intrenchments. Moreover, the ground on this side of Ladysmith adapted itself more readily to this defensive method than the broken ground on the north. Two forts, one at Highlander's Post to the left of the Acton Homes road, and one on Maiden's Castle, proved sufficient for the whole western front of Hamilton's section. Four forts at fairly regular intervals, manned by the Manchesters,

formed the principle defence of Cæsar's Camp, at that time the only part of the Platrand included in the perimeter.

Their disposition on Cæsar's Camp.

The chief of these, known as Manchester Fort, near the western end of the hill, was built and loopholed for two companies. Its walls were about seven feet high and twelve feet thick; it had underground magazines and telephone connection with headquarters. The second and third, holding one company each, and the fourth, holding half a company, were smaller but almost equally strong and equally unaffected by shell-fire. A fifth work, not quite so complete, was subsequently added close to the eastern end of the hill. The actual eastern face of the hill was not provided with any fortification, as the position was considered too exposed to shell-fire from Bulwana. Between the forts were the gun-pits of Goulburn's battery * and a few minor works. The whole of this strong line of defence was placed close to the rear edge of the plateau. Here it commanded a clear field of fire over the flat top,† while reinforcements could rapidly be brought up to it under cover. The disposition of the forts was concealed from the enemy and protected from surprise by a strong picket line on the forward edge of the hill, divided into five sections numbered from west to east, corresponding to the forts behind them. This line was disposed irregularly in small semicircular sangars and rifle-pits or behind natural cover, and was so skilfully posted that the enemy's guns never succeeded in locating it. As long as the enemy did not attack in great force the outpost line would naturally be held and the enemy kept off the hill altogether. But the main object of the defence scheme as formulated by Hamilton at the opening of the siege was not to hold the

* The artillery on Cæsar's Camp was reinforced before January 6 by a naval 12-pdr., a 9-pdr. and a 3-pdr. Natal Hotchkiss.

† The top of Cæsar's Camp is about 2,500 yards long with a breadth of from 500 at its eastern to over 800 yards at its western end; a slight dip separates it from Wagon Hill, 1,200 yards long and 400 yards broad; a rather lower nek divides Wagon Hill from the little plateau, 200 yards long by 50 yards broad, of Wagon Point. Wagon Point and the south-eastern end of Cæsar's Camp are covered with stunted trees, while the slopes and gullies of Cæsar's Camp, and to a less extent of Wagon Hill, were dotted with bushes extending down to the bush-covered floor of the valley.

whole Platrand from base to summit on every side, but simply to deny to the enemy the use of the Cæsar's Camp plateau, from which they could have dominated Ladysmith. It was an unambitious scheme, in keeping with the general attitude of the defence during the week that followed the battle of October 30, but it was based on a carefully-thought-out policy and well adapted to the purpose which it was intended to fulfil, namely, the secure maintenance of a long line of defence with the utmost economy of men. There was only one serious defect in its execution—the omission to place any works on the eastern face of the hill which would have commanded that flank and have prevented any attempt to turn it. Even with this defect there can be little doubt that the main defence line of Cæsar's Camp would have proved sufficient if it had ever been put seriously to the test.

Subsequent inclusion of Wagon Hill.

After the easy repulse of the Boer attack of November 9 by the Manchester pickets on the crest-line, the Cæsar's Camp garrison, and Ladysmith generally, began to consider it natural that the whole hill should be held and to look to the crest as the real line of defence from which the Boers could effectively be kept across the Fourie's Spruit. A conversion of the outpost works into a continuous fortification still remained out of the question for a garrison of 650 men. But it is possible that the Manchesters might have done somewhat more than they did to improve the defences on the crest, and they ought certainly to have been ordered to cut down the scrub and bushes on the slopes of the hill and to convert them into an *abattis*, which would have been a useful precaution against a night assault. Wagon Hill, too, and Wagon Point were now occupied, at first as a mere post of observation, by two weak squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse. Subsequently the relaxation of the pressure on the northern portion of the perimeter enabled Sir G. White to spare three weak companies of the 60th, and the whole of the Platrand was now included in the regular defences. The eastern half of Wagon Hill was assigned to the 60th, and in conformity with the general defence policy of the section a strong fort was constructed near the inner edge of the plateau, with two shell-proof sangars to right and left in

front of it, and lighter shelters for the outposts on the crest-line. This was as much as 150 men could do with the few tools available and the little time at their disposal after performing their other duties.* The Light Horse, reduced before January 6 to a strength of 80 men, held the western end of Wagon Hill and Wagon Point. They constructed a small circular fort on the north-western shoulder of Wagon Hill commanding the nek and the whole top of Wagon Point, but after completing this they specially requested to be allowed to dispense with further artificial works, which they considered would only serve as a target for Boer shells, and to use the natural cover of the rocks with which the crest-line was freely strewn. There were, however, the two empty emplacements of the 6·3-inch howitzers a little way down the reverse slope of the nek, and three gun-pits, two near the extreme end of Wagon Point and one on the northern edge near the middle, in which two naval guns had been temporarily placed just before Colenso. In view of the intended movement by Buller towards Potgieter's Drift, it had been decided once more to mount a 4·7-inch naval gun on Wagon Point, and the gun, together with a 3-pounder Natal Hotchkiss, was sent round on the night of January 5. As a general reserve for the whole of Hamilton's section of defence, three companies of the Gordons were camped at Fly Kraal under the northern slope of Cæsar's Camp. Including these the total force at Hamilton's disposal for the defence of the Platrand amounted to just over 1,000 men. These were quite insufficient to fortify or to hold against a really strong attack the whole four and a half miles of crest, and the real final defence still remained the one originally planned along the rear edge of Cæsar's Camp and extended afterwards along the rear edge of Wagon Hill. But this fact was not generally realized and even before January 6 visitors to the Platrand were in the habit of contrasting the light shelters of the Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill picket-line with the main fortifications of other sections, and of shaking their heads over Ian Hamilton's negligence; while, after the

* It should be remembered that in view of the enemy's fire all construction and excavation work had to be done at night.

Boer attempt, under the influence of the general impression that the defence of the hill had really been in danger, the voice of criticism made itself freely heard.

Jan. 5–6. The Boers assemble for the attack.

At sundown on January 5 the Boer commandants received the order to attack the Platrand before daybreak on the 6th. A few hours later they rode out of their laagers and assembled at the appointed rendezvous, the bulk of the Transvaalers behind a little hill facing the south-eastern corner of Cæsar's Camp, the Free Staters behind Mounted Infantry Hill. The concentration against Wagon Hill narrowly escaped detection by the British. That same evening Captain Richardson, 11th Hussars, commanding D squadron, Imperial Light Horse, on Wagon Point, had gone out and successfully examined the Boer gun emplacement on Middle Hill, with a view to emulating the Gun Hill and Surprise Hill feats. He must have come back under the slopes of Mounted Infantry Hill almost immediately before the Boers assembled there. The advance from the different rendezvous, which took place between one and two o'clock, ought in any case to have been discovered if the British had maintained any proper system of night scouting, but in this respect there was little to choose between them and the Boers.* On the eastern side the Transvaalers—minus the Krugersdorpers, who had satisfied themselves that the Klip River was too deep to cross that night and had gone to bed again—crossed the Fourie's Spruit and began slowly making their way up the bush-grown south-eastern buttress of Cæsar's Camp, a strong party of Heidelbergers with a few Utrechters branching off to the right to try and get round the British flank. Many stayed in the sheltering bed of the Fourie's Spruit on the way, and the numbers of the storming party grew less and less as they ascended. The same is true of the Vryheiders on their left,

* By a curious coincidence Hamilton had proposed to occupy Bester's Farm as a permanent outpost that very night. The request was refused by Sir G. White in accordance with his mistaken but consistent policy of keeping strictly within his lines, and avoiding any risk of losing life in minor operations. But it is interesting to think what might have happened if it had been granted—most probably the Boers would have jumped to the conclusion that their plan had been betrayed and would have given up the attempt.

and the Winburgers beyond them, while the Germans, after spending several hours in constructing emplacements for the newly-arrived guns, did not start till dawn and never succeeded in reaching the foot of the hill. The main Free State storming party, led by Fighting-General C. J. de Villiers of Harrismith, one of the stormers of Majuba, marched straight across the valley to a deep donga which runs up into the nek between Wagon Hill and Wagon Point, and began resolutely clambering up the bed of the donga and the steep slopes on either side.

Opening of the fight on Wagon Hill. 2.45 A.M.

The garrison at the end of Wagon Hill were, if anything, more than usually wide awake that night. During the earlier hours the pickets had been on the look-out for Richardson's return. Soon after 1 A.M. the naval gun had arrived at the foot of the hill, and two wagons, containing the gun platform and other equipment, had immediately been sent, with all the clattering and objurgation incidental to driving oxen up a steep place, up to Wagon Point, where the gun's crew of a dozen sailors and a party of 30 sappers under Lieutenant Digby Jones began unloading. By 2 A.M. these were joined by a working party of some 60 Gordons, sent over from Fly Kraal. About 2.30 A.M. Corporal Dunn, in charge of the main picket of the Imperial Light Horse, posted some way down the slope below the nek, heard the sound of men moving among the boulders at the foot of the hill and reported to Captain Mathias, commanding C squadron on Wagon Hill. Mathias was away placing a guard over the 4·7 gun. But Lieutenant Normand at once alarmed the rest of the squadron, sending the off-duty men forward to support the picket. It was now 2.45 A.M., and the picket could plainly hear the Boers coming up the gully at their feet, and even distinguish the muffled words of encouragement from the leaders. There was no time to be wasted. Dunn challenged, and the picket, as soon as they could distinguish movement amid the black of night, fired a volley down the slope. The answer was a crash of musketry. The picket redoubled their fire. The Boers scrambled desperately up the slope and a blind fight began at point-blank range, minutes of stillness broken by

rattling bursts of fire at a voice or the sound of a moving body. Mathias rushed up the hill to rejoin his squadron. In the nek he stumbled across the Hotchkiss. To run it forward and fire a few rounds of case shot down into the darkness was the work of an instant. The unexpected flash and report of a cannon proved too much for many of the Boers, who bolted back or halted at the foot of the slope. On Wagon Point Richardson had at the first alarm drawn in his pickets, and now moved in the direction of the firing along to the south-eastern edge of the plateau. The sound of his voice as he called his men forward towards the nek at once drew a volley. Richardson was hit, but Lieutenant Adams, who took over the command, led on some twenty men and established them on the open slope above the nek, where for the moment they were protected by the darkness. Meanwhile among the working party on the top of Wagon Hill the outbreak of fire created a general confusion. Digby Jones promptly kicked over the lanterns which might have drawn the fire, and formed up his sappers in some sort of order behind the big gun emplacement, where Gunner Sims and some of the sailors joined them. The Gordons had left their arms piled a little way off and now rushed to find them. On the way they came across some of the Light Horse, and the difficulty of distinguishing them from Boers, owing to the similarity of headdress, added to the confusion. Lieutenants McGregor and Macnaghten, at the head of a small party, ran forward to the sound of the firing. In the darkness they fell right into the middle of the Boers, and such of them as remained unwounded were made prisoners and detained beneath the nek till rescued later in the day. Of the rest, some joined the picket-line, and others found their way to different points on the hill, but the initial confusion and the loss of their officers and most of their non-commissioned officers had impaired their cohesion, and the brunt of the fighting at this early stage fell mainly upon the Light Horse.

The Boers get on the crest but no farther. 3.15–5 A.M.

At the end of half an hour, as the Boer fire seemed steadily to increase in intensity and threatened to outflank the men on the slope, Mathias gave the order to retire to the top of Wagon Hill. The retirement was effected under

a murderous fire as the men became silhouetted against the sky-line, now fast turning grey, and many failed to reach the shelter of the little fort and of the low outcrop of rock extending south-eastwards from it across the plateau, which now stood between the Boers and the capture of the hill. The Boers immediately pressed forward. Mathias, who had dragged back the Hotchkiss and hauled it into the fort, thinking some of the picket had not yet retired, ran forward to withdraw them. Jumping down the little ledge of rock that marked the edge of the nek, he found himself in the midst of the Boers. The Hotchkiss now opened again, and while the Boers crouched close up under the ledge, Mathias slipped away unrecognized from his unwelcome company and rejoined his men in the fort. From here he sent to the 60th Fort for reinforcements, but all that the officer in command considered he was justified in sending, in view of the heavy fire now opened on the western part of the hill by the Winburgers, was a corporal and eight men. With these and a dozen Gordons who found their way up Mathias and his handful of Light Horsemen prepared to hold on desperately till relief should come. The Boers were now over the nek, and, working forward and upwards to their right, established themselves in the outcrop of loose rock on the south-western point of the hill. A gallant little party, led by Field-Cornet Jan Cilliers of Heilbron, pushed right on to the foot of the fort and lined the southern side of the rocks held by the British, their rifle barrels almost crossing with those of the defenders. But they failed to maintain their hold and were soon compelled to extricate themselves with some loss of life, including that of their brave leader. This was the farthest point the attack was destined to reach that day. About the same time a party of perhaps twenty Boers attempted to work round to the rear of the British position along the foot of Wagon Point. The guard over the 4·7-inch gun, collecting some stragglers from the working party, repelled this attack, and so placed themselves that it was never renewed. The attempt to capture Wagon Hill had failed.

Hamilton goes off to

The noise of the firing on Wagon Hill wakened Ian Hamilton, who was sleeping at the head of a small gully

Wagon Hill. 4 A.M.

at the north-eastern end of Cæsar's Camp. Sending a messenger down to Fly Kraal for the three reserve companies of Gordons to come up at once, he made his way along the hill to Manchester Fort. It was now 3.45 A.M. Before this the Manchester pickets had heard the enemy moving up the steep sides of the hill, and firing was now breaking out along the crest. The whole crest-line was held at double strength, as Colonel Curran, in view of the outbreak of fire on Wagon Hill, had ordered the old pickets to stand fast when the reliefs took over at 3.30 A.M. Curran was just running forward to the crest-line to see for himself what was happening when Hamilton came up. The situation on Cæsar's Camp did not seem to warrant any anxiety, so telling Curran that he left him in command of the hill and was sending him a company of Gordons as support, Hamilton hurried off to Wagon Hill.

Asks for reinforcements.

The darkness was whistling with bullets, which struck sparks out of the boulders all round him as he ran, an indication of the desperate fighting that was going on beyond. At the 60th Fort he found Major Gore-Browne and a dozen Riflemen, and learnt enough of what had occurred to warrant an urgent telephone message to Sir G. White for reinforcements. He had already instructed Major Miller-Wallnutt of the Gordons to follow him, which he did with the two companies whose working party was already on Wagon Point. White at once ordered Colonel Edwards with the remaining three squadrons of the Imperial Light Horse to reinforce Wagon Hill, while the four headquarters companies of the Gordons were to proceed to Fly Kraal to act as a reserve for Cæsar's Camp. The reinforcements turned out with admirable promptitude. The Light Horse were in action before 5 A.M.; while, within twenty minutes of the receipt of his instructions, Colonel Dick-Cunyngham, V.C., was mortally wounded as he was leading the Gordons through the scrub on the right bank of the Klip River.

Boers capture S.E. corner of Cæsar's Camp. 4.15 A.M.

Scarcely had Hamilton left Cæsar's Camp when the complexion of affairs took a more serious turn. The Boer attempt on the south face of the hill, coming as it did almost an hour after the attack on Wagon Hill, had found the

defenders fully prepared and reinforced. In face of the steady and accurate shooting of the Manchesters, the Vryheid men, under Commandant Grobler, and the main body of Utrecht and Wakkerstroom burghers on their right gave up all idea of rushing the crest, and, throwing themselves down among the rocks and bushes, kept up a heavy fire on the sky-line. Meanwhile the flanking party on the extreme right, boldly led by Commandants Spruyt of Heidelberg and Hattingh of Utrecht, had ascended three-quarters of the way up the south-eastern buttress, and, turning to their right, had clambered along the eastern face of the hill, evading Royston's patrols, which only extended half way up the slope. They now suddenly emerged on the crest (4.15 A.M.) and threw themselves upon the extreme left group of No. V. picket, whom they overpowered after a short but desperate struggle. Had they been in any force their presence at this point would have constituted a most serious menace to the safety of the whole position. Owing to the doubling of the picket-line, the forts in rear were very weakly manned, and a determined advance along the northern edge of the plateau might have placed the Boers in possession of several of the forts, and even of the nearest gun-pit, by daylight. Attacked in front and rear, and with the Boers barring the only road by which reinforcements could come, the situation of the Manchesters would have been desperate. But the Boers on the crest were only a small party, perhaps 50 in all, and their supports were straggling behind them over the hill-side. Looming dimly through the grey dawn, the forts, whose existence was apparently a surprise to most of them, seemed far too formidable to make it worth while leaving the tempting cover of the rocky and bush-grown south-eastern end of the hill, or running the risk of getting cut off from all support or chance of escape. They did what, under the circumstances, was the obvious thing to do. They turned to their left and began rolling up the thin line of the British on the south-eastern crest. Here they encountered a desperate resistance. The Manchesters (A and D companies) held on to their sangars and rifle-pits with the most heroic determination, and group after group had to

be completely annihilated before the Boers could win a few yards of crest-line. But slowly and surely the enemy, with equal gallantry, pushed their way. Reinforced from below at daylight, they were now in possession of the eastern crest down to the extreme toe of the plateau, having practically wiped out the left half of No. V. picket, and were beginning to work round by the southern edge.

The situation discovered.

No word of all this reached any one in command, not a man of No. V. picket having left his post, and no message having been sent back by any officer. But Colonel Curran, on the crest with No. IV. picket, only a few hundred yards away, more than suspected from the noise of the firing that the left of his line was hard pressed, and at 5 A.M. ordered up half of C company from No. III. fort to reinforce it. This measure proved sufficient to check any further advance of the Boers along the crest. Before this Major Simpson, who had been left behind at Manchester Fort, had suggested to Captain the Hon. R. F. Carnegie, in command of G company of the Gordons, left in reserve on the hill, that the eastern end of the hill required reinforcement. Carnegie took his men down to the sangar at the extreme north-eastern corner of the hill. Here he waited while Lieutenant Hunt-Grubbe of the Manchesters went forward to see what the pickets were doing. Grubbe walked along the crest straight into the arms of the Boers, who made him a prisoner. After waiting awhile Carnegie determined to follow, but rendered suspicious by Grubbe's continued absence, he took his men down below the crest-line and proceeded to work round cautiously among the boulders. Suddenly he saw two men in slouch hats on the crest and realized what had occurred. A shot from his carbine dropped one and immediately drew a heavy fire in reply. Carnegie attempted to advance, but, though he was now joined by a squadron of the Border Mounted Rifles under Major Rethmann, the Boers opened a hot fire, which drove the volunteers back in some confusion, and effectually kept the Gordons under cover. But help was to come from below. A shell whistled over the Highlanders' heads with the whip-like crack of bursting shrapnel, then another and another in quick succession.

At 5 A.M. Colonel Royston, hearing that the right of his outpost line was outflanked, had ridden forward to the foot of the hill with some of the Natal Mounted Rifles. Here he could see the whole situation at a glance: the Boers spread over all the south-eastern slope right up to the crest, and the little party of Gordons in the rocks at the north-eastern corner. He had at once ordered Rethmann's squadron to support the latter, and another squadron under Captain J. A. Royston to push forward along the lower slope, and had sent word to Major Abdy to bring up his battery. Crossing the river the 53rd came into action at 6 A.M. in the scrub north of Fly Kraal against a target such as was rarely given to gunners in this war of long ranges and guess-work firing. There, directly in front of them, at 2,200 yards range, was the slope of Cæsar's Camp crowded with Boers dotted about in fancied security. In a moment the wicked shrapnel was bursting over them at its deadliest range. Welcoming the support Carnegie at once led his Gordons forward. The gunners saw his move, and, lengthening their fuzes, swept the Boers back along the slope in front of him. But the gallant Heidelbergers still clung to the cover of the captured breastworks on the crest. Ordering a volley, Carnegie fixed bayonets and rushed in. The Boers stood up to meet the attack, fired point-blank at the charging Highlanders, and then, their heart failing them, turned and leapt down over the boulders. Carnegie shot four with his carbine and was himself severely wounded in two places. But, though weak from loss of blood, he continued to direct his firing-line, which now pushed forward among the scrub and boulders of the crest. Driven steadily back the Boers collected on the slopes of a broad re-entrant at the south-eastern end. Here they were less exposed to the shrapnel and could bring a heavy fire to bear on the rocky buttress separating them from the main eastern face. Beyond this buttress the Highlanders attempted in vain to advance. But they had done their work. The Boer attack was now completely contained, and the storming party were only waiting for dusk to extricate themselves from their perilous position.

Aided by artillery Carnegie drives back Boers. 6 A.M.

Meanwhile the battery in the plain had not been allowed to

Boer guns open on Abdy's battery.

carry on its deadly work undisturbed. Ever since daylight the 6-inch gun on Bulwana, where Joubert with his wife and staff had taken up their position to watch the issue of the attack, had been dropping its heavy projectiles on the crest-line of Cæsar's Camp and on to the impenetrable walls of Goulburn's gun-pits, supported by every gun of smaller calibre that had been brought within range. Seeing the confusion among their men on the opposite hillside and soon discovering its cause,* the Boer gunners now opened a hot fire on Abdy's battery with the 6-inch and a howitzer. But most of their shells fell short into the scrub behind which Abdy had skilfully taken cover, and though a few took effect the trifling casualties inflicted never for a moment diverted the attention of the British gunners from their work.† The aim of the Boer gunners was further disconcerted by the naval gun at Cove Redoubt which chimed in vigorously in this zig-zag duel. After firing about sixty rounds "Long Tom" wearied of the business and returned to the shelling of Cæsar's Camp. At 9 A.M. Abdy, having completed the piece of work set him to do, withdrew his men under cover.

Opportunity for a counter-attack.

From the verandah of his house on Convent Hill, Sir George White could command a clear view of the eastern face of Cæsar's Camp and of Abdy's battery in the scrub below. Here was the opportunity, if only he had realized it, for a really effective counter-stroke! The general situation at this period of the morning (8 A.M. to 10 A.M.) was, according to the information which reached headquarters, distinctly reassuring, and might well have warranted such a step. The Boers had been pushed back on Cæsar's Camp; Wagon Hill was reported clear except for a small body clinging to a point on the southern slope; the Observation Hill attack, which at one moment looked as if it had been seriously intended, had clearly got no weight of men behind it. Royston's volunteers were already pushing back

* Mrs. Joubert is said to have been the first to have drawn the attention of the gunners to Abdy's battery.

† The fine spirit animating the battery may be gauged by the action of Sergeant Boseley, whose left arm and leg were carried away by a shell, and who was taken off the field waving his remaining arm and adjuring his section to "buck up."

the Boers at the foot of Cæsar's Camp. Reinforced by the Gordons at Fly Kraal and by dismounted cavalry, and supported by the fire of the 53rd Battery, a counter-attack along the base and lower slopes of the hill would have threatened the flank and rear of the storming parties on the Boer right, and at once eased the pressure on the defenders above. The least result that would have followed from such a move would have been the hurried evacuation by the Boers, in broad daylight and under a heavy flanking fire, of the slopes to which, as it was, they clung till the light was already failing. Pushed boldly and rapidly the advance might even have succeeded in cutting off all the Boers on the south-eastern end of the hill, and given White his revenge for Nicholson's Nek. The counter-attack would have been subject to nothing worse than the fire of the Gun Hill and Bulwana guns, whose effect upon troops scattered in the scrub could not have been very serious. But White's conception of defence on this day seems to have been strictly confined to the direct reinforcement of the points attacked. He had already, at 5.30 A.M., ordered six companies of the Rifle Brigade and eight of the 60th Rifles to reinforce Cæsar's Camp and Wagon Hill respectively, and now (about 9.30 A.M.) followed them up by sending the 5th Lancers, 100 dismounted men of the 19th Hussars, and some Liverpool mounted infantry to the eastern, and the 18th Hussars to the western end of the great ridge.

Misdirected efforts of Cæsar's Camp reinforcements. 7 A.M.–2 P.M.

The arrival of the Rifle Brigade at Manchester Fort at 7 A.M. was unknown to Curran, who was still in the firing-line, where his continued presence was hardly necessary, while his absence from his headquarters, with which signalling communication seems to have been defective, seriously impaired the general direction of the defence. Unable to extract any guidance from the officer at Manchester Fort beyond a general intimation that the south-eastern point of the hill was most hardly pressed, Colonel Metcalfe sent forward F and D companies (Captains Mills and Biddulph) across the open plateau. Marching in extended order, F company towards the rear of the surviving right half of No. V. Manchester picket, and D company to their left rear, the Riflemen got

within 150 yards of the crest when they were suddenly met by a staggering short-ranged fire from their left front, where, unknown to them, the Boers still held a small section of the crest. Their officers were wounded—Mills mortally—and the men threw themselves down and strove to return the fire. They remained there, lying in the open all day, unable to move, and suffering considerable losses—the unfortunate result of misdirection. The remaining companies were more cautiously directed, and following the route along the north-eastern crest-line, gained touch with Carnegie's Highlanders by about 9 A.M. They failed, however, to get beyond the buttress which had already stopped Carnegie. Even the reinforcement, at 2 P.M., of this part of the field by two more companies of the Gordons, who had come up from Fly Kraal at 11.30 A.M., only added to the over-crowding. The fact is that reinforcements were never really required on Cæsar's Camp itself, once the stubborn resistance of the Manchesters and Carnegie's spirited advance had confined the Boer hold on the crest to the south-eastern re-entrant. To this the burghers clung, not in order to press any further attack, but simply and solely to avoid having to run down the hill in full daylight. Curran realized this at an early stage in the morning, though it was not till 10 A.M. that he at last left the firing-line and informed both White and Hamilton of the satisfactory state of affairs on the hill which alone was of vital importance for the defence of Ladysmith.

Daylight on Wagon Hill.

Meanwhile on the western end of the Platrand daylight had revealed an extraordinary situation. The south-western shoulder of Wagon Hill was in the possession of some 250 Free Staters, their centre firmly ensconced in half an acre of boulders on the actual summit. To their right for a hundred yards or so a fringe of farmer marksmen lay deftly sandwiched in among the rocks on the crest-line. To their left front the burghers lined the eastern slopes of the nek almost to the foot of the Imperial Light Horse redoubt, while others lay below the ledge, where Mathias had walked into their ranks in the darkness, in the gully beneath, and along the slopes of Wagon Point. Facing them, in the redoubt, where they commanded most of the nek and the whole summit of Wagon Hill and

Wagon Point, and under the outcrop of rocks on its left, lay Mathias's stalwart handful, grimly firing away in their unyielding resolve to cling to the position committed to their charge. Away to their left were the Rifles; some lining the south-eastern crest and replying to the fire of the Vryheiders in Bester's Valley, others in the sangars or embedded in the patches of rock on the plateau facing towards the Free State storming party. In front of them across the nek lay the little party of D squadron which had followed Adams. At the farthest end of Wagon Point and in the gun emplacements a little knot of sappers, bluejackets, and Highlanders were busy keeping the Boers down at the foot of the hill, and checking the reinforcements coming from Mounted Infantry Hill and collecting in the Flagstaff Spruit. Scattered groups of men were under the northern crest. The actual summit of Wagon Point was clear except for one of the wagons, whose span of oxen went on grazing placidly through the fight in spite of the constant stream of rifle bullets sent skimming over the plateau by the Vryheiders and Germans on the slopes to the east and in Bester's Valley, and by the Free Staters on Mounted Infantry Hill and in the Long Valley and of the shells which were now freely bursting over the hill.* As the light strengthened, those who had failed to chance on good cover in the dark were shot as they lay, betrayed by the pitiless dawn. The Light Horsemen on the bare shoulder of Wagon Point suffered most, exposed as they were to a plunging fire from across the nek. Adams was killed, and all but five were dead or out of action before the remnant could extricate themselves some hours later. But, if they suffered, their flanking fire was hardly less effective upon the Boers. The position of the Free State storming party was indeed not an enviable one. Nearly half their number had failed to carry through the night attack. The Winburgers, who were to have been on the crest-line to their

* Only eight out of sixteen oxen were killed in the course of the day, an interesting indication of the worthlessness of unaimed fire, and of all theories based on the deadliness of the bullet-swept zone such fire creates. Any single Boer in the rocks across the nek could have picked them all off in five minutes.

right, were nowhere to be seen. The supports kept up a tremendous long-range fire on every side, nearly as dangerous to their own men on the hill as to the British, but showed not the slightest inclination to come forward and help the attack. Without reinforcements the attempt to rush the Imperial Light Horse fort or cross the open plateau, which had failed in the dark, was hopeless in the daylight. All this De Villiers realized. But he also knew that his men were secure where they were and could not be dislodged except at the cost of heavy losses to the British. He decided to cling on to the foothold his men had gained, ready to advance in case of a favourable development in the general situation, or else to retire with safety and honour after dusk.

Wagon Hill. 4.30–10 A.M.

Such was the general situation which confronted Ian Hamilton on his arrival. He at once sent forward Miller-Wallnutt under the northern slope of the hill to reinforce the little party at the end of Wagon Point, and followed himself in order to see if it might be possible to work round the Point and take the Boers in flank. A few minutes later the rest of the Imperial Light Horse came galloping up to the foot of the hill. Edwards ran up and, as soon as he was informed as to the situation, distributed his men. Captain Codrington's squadron (E), the first to arrive, was hurried up into the outcrop to the left of the position held by C squadron, a troop being, however, detached to Wagon Point. F squadron pushed up to their right to reinforce C. As they came up, hardly realizing the situation, Lieutenant Pakeman and, a moment later, Lord Ava, who was carrying a message for Hamilton, fell mortally wounded. Great gallantry was displayed in attempts to bring these officers under cover, and Colonel Frank Rhodes succeeded in withdrawing Ava out of the fire. B squadron was sent to the left to support the Rifles on the crest and to complete the line across the plateau. Several men of this squadron were shot crossing the open, and Major Doveton was mortally wounded soon after, otherwise the losses in this squadron were light, in spite of the fact that its left was within thirty yards of the Boer right. The reinforce-

ment was the signal for a renewed outburst of fire, and casualties began to come fast and thick. Edwards was hit in two places, and the command passed to Karri Davies, who was put out of action not long after while inspecting the situation on Wagon Point. Codrington started to lead a rush against the crest in order to stop this deadly short-range fire; but his orders were unheard in the din of firing and only one man followed him. A few yards from cover he fell wounded. The attempt was, by Hamilton's orders, renewed repeatedly upon the arrival at 7 A.M. of Major W. P. Campbell with the reinforcing companies of the 60th. With a handful of men Major Mackworth attempted the task. His following were swept back and he himself met a soldier's death. Lieutenant Raikes fell in an equally fruitless charge. Lieutenant Tod gallantly led a third rush into the open. Before they got three yards from cover he was shot dead, and seven of the twelve men who followed were hit. The heroism of the officers was unavailing to induce the men to face the deadly fire across the few yards of open between them and the enemy. On the left Major Bowen, with eight men, tried to work round the Boer right under the southern crest, but he and most of his men were killed almost at once. The fighting gradually became stationary, the two lines lying under the blazing sun, almost touching each other among the rocks at their ends, and divided by an impassable strip of open grass in the middle.

Artillery in action 6.30 A.M. Situation at noon.

Meanwhile, in rear of the hill, the 21st Battery had come into action at 6.30 A.M. between Range Post and Sign Post Ridge. Shelling Mounted Infantry Hill at 3,400 yards for an hour, Major Blewitt most effectively reduced the fire of the Boer supports, and prevented the bringing up of a pom-pom, which might have proved troublesome to the defenders of Wagon Hill. The presence on this flank of the battery and of its escort of 5th Dragoon Guards also proved most useful in restraining the enterprise of the Boers in the bed of the Flagstaff Spruit, but no attempt was made to employ it in co-operation with a flank movement round Wagon Point, a movement which would, however, have been more difficult and dangerous than a similar counter-attack

on the side of Cæsar's Camp. On Wagon Point the British gradually improved their position, more especially after the arrival of two companies of the 60th Rifles. Most of the southern crest-line was now occupied, and a vigorous fire was kept up from it on the Boer supports below, while the fire from the summit succeeded in pushing back some of the Boers on the eastern slope of the nek. The arrival at 10 A.M. of the 18th Hussars still further strengthened the British on this side. From this time onwards the firing on both sides began to slacken along the whole fighting-line. Towards 11 A.M. the news of the satisfactory condition of affairs on Cæsar's Camp was passed down the British ranks, and it was generally considered that there would be no difficulty in dislodging the Boers at dusk—a view in which, as it happened, the Boers fully concurred.

The attempt to storm Wagon Point. 1 P.M.

The reinforcement of Wagon Point by the British had, however, seriously disconcerted the Boers, and about midday General De Villiers, alarmed at the prospect of a possible counter-attack from that side, decided to make an attempt to dislodge them. A small party of 15 to 20 Harrismith men, under Field-Cornets Japie de Villiers and Zacharias de Jager, were sent down from the crest with orders to collect others and attack Wagon Point from its extreme western end. This move was inspired by a sound instinct, for at that very moment Hamilton was meditating a plan to turn the Boer flank round the slopes of Wagon Point, and at 1 P.M. he returned to the Point to give Miller-Wallnutt instructions for putting his plan into execution. Nor was the time for the attack ill-chosen. A great part of the troops on the Point had gone down the northern side of the hill in order to get some lunch. Of those left in the firing-line not a few were fast asleep. Scrambling up the almost precipitous crags at the very point of the hill, the little band of resolute stormers were almost on the summit before they were perceived. As at Majuba the sudden sight of the felt hats and bearded faces emerging over the crest, and the burst of point-blank fire, were too much for the defenders. Hamilton had just found Miller-Wallnutt, and was giving his instructions for the counter-attack as soon as the starving men

should have had a mouthful of food. Suddenly there was a tremendous rattle of musketry, a cry of "Here they come!" and, before anyone could move a finger, the mixed troops above had broken and came rushing headlong down the slope.

The rally on the Point.

Hamilton, Wallnutt, Captain Fitzgerald, Sergeant Lindsay, and Trooper Albrecht, I.L.H., Gunner Sims, R.N., and others threw themselves against the stream of panic-stricken men and checked their flight. Then they sprang forward to the crest. A dozen Boers had leapt on to the summit. But in the teeth of a hail of bullets from the Imperial Light Horse fort, 200 yards away, all but three hung back. The three, De Villiers, De Jager, and Gert Wessels, rushed forward. There was a wild race for the gun-pits. Hamilton reached the 4·7 emplacement first, and, leaning his arm on the sandbag parapet, fired his revolver at the nearest Boer. Almost immediately Albrecht fired from outside the pit, while, at the same moment, from the other gun-pit rose the head and shoulders of Digby Jones and of Corporal Hockaday, R.E., each firing at his man. De Villiers and De Jager fell dead against the wall of the 4·7 gun-pit; Wessels at the lower emplacement. Miller-Wallnutt fell, shot through the head, as he reached the 4·7 gun-pit; the brave Albrecht a second later. Within five minutes from the first surprise all was over. The Boers bolted down the hill, and the British, reinforced by the 18th Hussars and by another company of the 60th from the reserves, reoccupied the summit. Digby Jones, whose heroism and coolness had been conspicuous all day, was killed while leading some of the shaken men back to their positions, and Lieutenant Dennis, R.E., fell as he reached his side to help him.

White orders hill to be cleared. His message to Buller.

Satisfied that another attempt was not imminent, Ian Hamilton returned to Wagon Hill. Here the situation was unchanged, though the burst of firing on Wagon Point had communicated a temporary energy to the combatants on the main plateau. Hamilton had given up the idea of a counter-attack, and was now content to wait for nightfall before clearing the crest at the point of the bayonet. But the assurance felt at the front was by no means shared at head-

quarters. Sir G. White had been growing more desperately anxious every hour, as he vainly waited for the news that the Boers had been driven off, and the report of the dramatic struggle on Wagon Point was not calculated to allay his apprehensions. His reply to Hamilton was that the hill was, at all costs, to be cleared before nightfall, and that a further reinforcement of three companies of the Devons was being sent to lend weight to a final effort. Orders were also sent to the 5th Lancers and 19th Hussars at the foot of Cæsar's Camp to go round and strengthen the firing-line on Wagon Hill. White had already, at 9 A.M., apprised Buller of the attack, and in subsequent messages had informed him that he had all his reserve in action, and had strongly hinted the desirability of a diversion to relieve the pressure on Ladysmith. It was now that the anxious message was flashed across, which the fast gathering storm-clouds cut short just after the opening words, "Attack renewed; very hard pressed," thus investing it with a poignantly dramatic significance to the nation left waiting in heart-sick suspense for the final news of the struggle.

4 P.M. The storm. Boers driven off Cæsar's Camp. 5.30 P.M.

All day the glowing African sun had beaten down upon the backs of the men lying with their faces close to the sweltering stones. But now the whole heavens darkened, and at four o'clock the threatening thunderstorm burst with a deluge of rain rare even in South Africa. The blinding, drenching downpour was full in the faces of the Boers, who, fearing that the British would now attempt to rush them off the crest, began firing wildly into the mist. Breaking out again as if by magic the rifle-fire rolled along the crest of Wagon Hill and spread to Wagon Point and to Cæsar's Camp in one unbroken deafening roar, reaching and sustaining an intensity which it had never touched before. But the exhausted troops on Wagon Hill were not yet ready for the attempt. On Wagon Point, indeed, some of the mixed detachments, hardly recovered from their first panic, suddenly came rushing back. The little nucleus of sappers, however, again stood firm. Lieutenant Reade gallantly rallied his broken Rifles, and the Highlanders recovered and faced round. In a minute the troops swung back again and the

panic was stayed. Only on Cæsar's Camp was the storm the signal for the British advance. Here the Manchester mounted infantry, under Captain Crichton, successfully drove the Boers off the section of the crest-line, to which they had clung for so many hours, down to a slightly lower position, whence they stubbornly refused to budge. But towards 5.30 P.M., as the rain left off, the Gordons and Rifle Brigade pushed forward and joined the Manchesters. Under the intense fire from the crest the splendid obstinacy of the Boers at last gave way, and in a few minutes storming party and reserve alike streamed away down the steep slopes, through the scrub and across the Fourie's Spruit, now a roaring, swollen torrent. The light was already failing, but many fell under the heavy rifle-fire with which the weary but exultant infantrymen hastened their flight from above. Several were drowned in the spruit, while others came under a searching shrapnel fire from the 42nd Battery on the hill, as they made their way towards the sheltering ridges beyond. In vain Joubert sent messages to Botha, who had only just reached the scene, to effect a diversion. It was too late, and the fugitives had to pay the penalty of defeat.

Arrival of the Devons on Wagon Hill. 5 P.M.

Just before five o'clock the three companies of Devons arrived and halted in a dip under the crest of Wagon Hill. Ian Hamilton went down to meet them, explained the situation to Colonel Park, and then, putting the question directly, asked if the Devons could clear the top of the hill. "We will try," was Park's laconic answer. Hamilton then took Park up to the outcrop of rocks held by the Light Horse and mixed reinforcements, and, as far as was possible under the still heavy fire, pointed out the direction to be taken. The Devons were to come quietly up to the crest and then charge straight across by the left hand end of the rocks over the 130 yards of open which had hitherto foiled every attempt, however gallant, to close with the enemy. It was a venture only to be entrusted to fresh and well-disciplined troops. But when Hamilton returned with Park and watched the bronzed determined faces of the men as their colonel gave his final instructions he knew that they would not fail him. Calmly Park completed his preparations. The companies

owing to the cramped space, had to be formed up in column, but were to change this formation when they advanced. The leading company (F) under Lieutenant Field was to charge straight across the plateau; Captain Lafone's company (E) to wheel half-right at the rocks and prolong the line to the right; Lieutenant Masterson's (D) to give weight to the centre of the charge. The Devons had now finally assorted themselves. Three lines of naked bayonets gleamed dully in the falling rain. Colonel Park, pale and collected, motioned to the bugler.

The Devons' charge. 6 P.M.

"Advance!" The colonel rose to his feet; the three companies rose with him as one man. With a cheer that foretold success they started charging from the first, up the slope, over the crest, and out into the open. A moment's lull, as of surprise, then the opposite crest-line burst into a sheet of flame. Springing to their feet the Boers emptied their magazines into the advancing line. As the Devons leapt over the rocks, silhouetted against the sinking sunlight on the crest over which all day the bravest had scarce dared to fire hasty shots, they were struck down like driven grouse. But the line, though sadly thinned, never wavered, never checked. A third of the open was crossed when Park, realizing that the direction of the charge was still too far to the left, diverted the rear company to the right. As the men wheeled round a few on the extreme right of the line threw themselves down and started firing. A moment later they were on their feet, and the whole line, still cheering madly, were into the patch of boulders the Boers had held all day and over the crest-line. On their left half a company of Manchesters under Captain Menzies, which had come over from Cæsar's Camp, prolonged the line. Some of the Light Horsemen and cavalry ran out from their cover to support the right. Firing to the last second the Boers turned and ran. But at the first convenient rocks they halted, still grimly determined not to be hunted down the hill in daylight. For the next half hour the fight went on, the Devons losing almost as heavily as in the charge. It was now that Field and Lafone were killed, and Masterson wounded in half-a-dozen places while most gallantly carrying

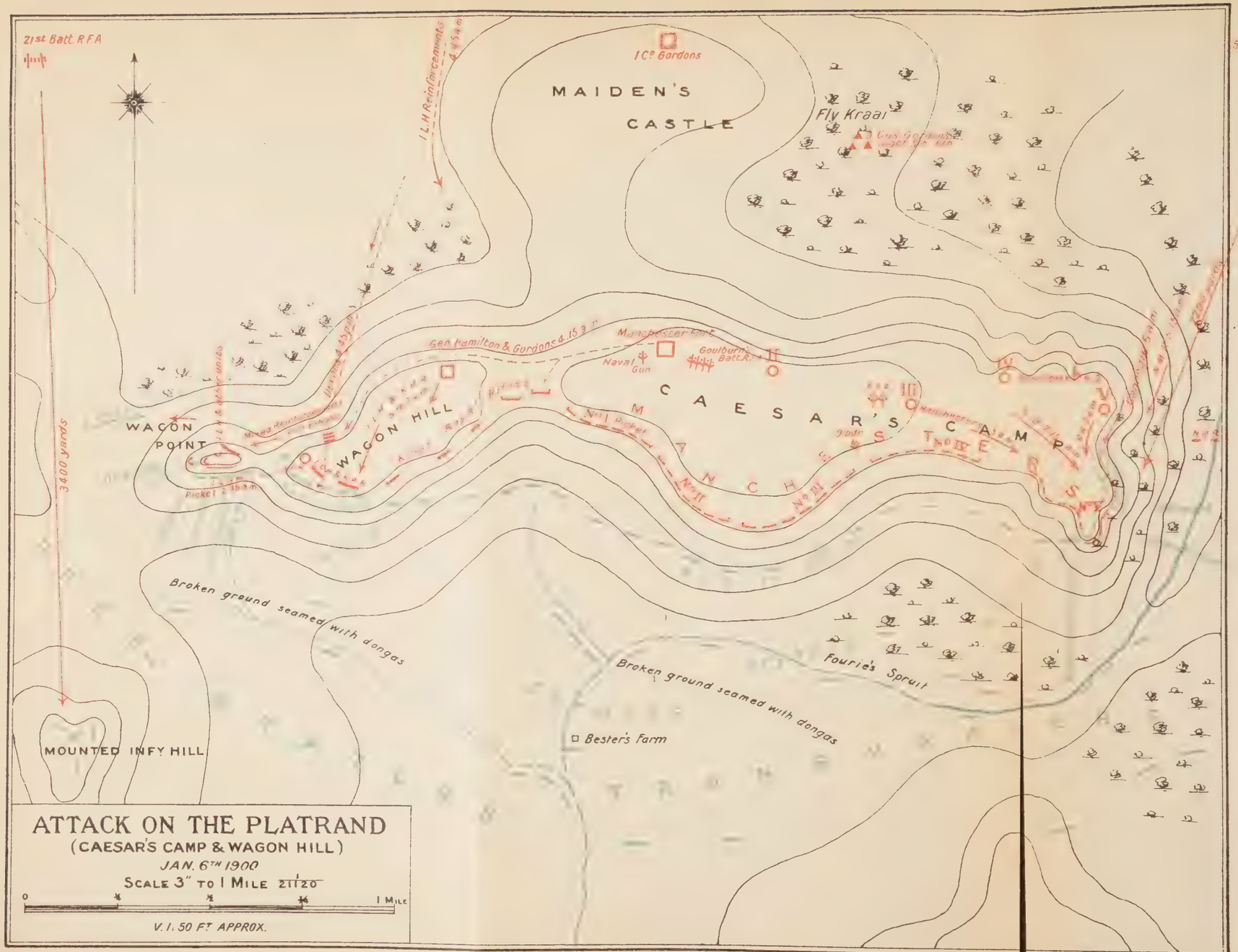
DIRECTIONS

British Forts & Sangars

British

Boers

Guns



back a message for supports.* A few minutes later it was dark, and the Boers now finally abandoned the hill, having, with unparalleled obstinacy, carried out the intention they had formed at dawn of not retreating before nightfall. De Villiers, whose coolness and courage had been the mainstay of the storming party, was the last to leave Wagon Hill.

The Boer failure.

Thus, after sixteen hours' desperate fighting, ended the great Boer attack upon the Platrand. It had been a failure from the start. At the Wagon Hill end the storming party had failed to effect a surprise, and though, by sheer weight of numbers, they had driven back the little garrison a few yards, and secured a lodgment on the crest, they made no real attempt to possess themselves of the key of the position, the admirably posted Imperial Light Horse fort above the nek. On Cæsar's Camp the Transvaalers were late, and found the Manchesters fully prepared. At one point only, on the eastern crest, had they succeeded in surprising the defenders, and here alone, had they been in real force, could they seriously have endangered the British tenure of the hill. The supports, who were to have reinforced the stormers as soon as the crest was taken, firmly declined to face the accurate rifle-fire of the Manchesters and of the Natal Volunteers on Cæsar's Camp and the slopes below, or the shrapnel from Blewitt's battery behind Wagon Hill. Of the containing attacks which were to have been made on the other sections of the Ladysmith defences, the only one which was even attempted was the attack on Observation Hill by the Pretorians. Even here only some 200 out of the whole force on the north of Ladysmith came into action, supported by a heavy artillery fire. The three companies of Devons under Major Curry had no difficulty in repelling them, though a small party made a very determined rush for the trenches, their leader, Willemse, of the Pretoria police, actually reaching the breastwork. The rest fell back behind the nearest cover and eventually made good their escape during

* For this Lieutenant Masterson received the Victoria Cross. The only officers killed in the actual charge were Lieutenant Walker (Somerset L.I. attached), and Lieutenant Hill, 5th Lancers, while Captain Menzies was wounded.

the great storm. The general concentration of guns against so extended a target as the Platrand was ineffective in the absence of any understanding or communication between the gunners and the storming parties on the crest. Through gross neglect the gunners on Telegraph Hill began the day with only three shells for their 6-inch gun. Leading there was none: the senior generals, Joubert, Schalk Burger and Prinsloo, seem to have been mere passive spectators of the struggle. The splendid courage and dogged determination of a few hundred men could avail nothing in the face of incompetent generalship and of the negligence and cowardice of the mass of the burghers.

Casualties of Jan. 6.

The total losses of the Boers on January 6 were officially given as 64 killed or died of wounds and 119 wounded. They were probably somewhat higher, perhaps 220–250 in all. From the Boer point of view these figures were disastrously heavy, but they indicate clearly how little the attack was ever pressed. Nearly two-thirds of the losses fell upon the Transvaalers on Cæsar's Camp, the gallant Heidelbergers alone losing 21 killed and 30 wounded. Of the Free State casualties the bulk fell on the Harrismith commando, which lost 15 killed * and 20 wounded. The British losses were heavier, mainly owing to the attempts to drive the Boers off the crest by charging across the open plateau. But 18 officers and 150 men killed † and 25 officers and 224 men wounded, or a total of 417, cannot be reckoned exceptionally heavy as the price of maintaining the integrity of the perimeter. The losses were heaviest on Wagon Hill, where the Imperial Light Horse and the Devons each lost 59, or 25 and 33 per cent. respectively of their numbers. The Manchesters lost 78 and the Rifle Brigade 46.

Dramatic interest and military unimportance of the fight.

As a stirring fight full of dramatic interest and breathless excitement, full too of the heroic tenacity of the two most

* Including four field-cornets, or assistant field-cornets: Jan Lyon, Jan van Wyk, Japie de Villiers, Zacharias de Jager.

† The British loss in killed on January 6 actually exceeded that of Colenso, and in proportion to wounded was more than three times as high, a significant indication of the difference between long-range fire on men in the open, and short-range fire among rocks. Most of the killed on both sides were shot through the head.

stubborn breeds of mankind, the engagement of January 6 will always be remembered. The splendid valour of the Imperial Light Horse, the steadfastness of the Manchesters, the irresistible determination of the Devons, will live in the traditions of the British Army, while Briton and Boer alike can recount with pride the long unyielding struggle on the main crest, or those desperate seconds of almost Homeric encounter round the gun-pits on Wagon Point. At the same time these very features of the day, joined with the natural anxieties of the headquarter staff in Ladysmith, and the agonized suspense of the nation at home, have tended to invest it with a military significance it never possessed. The legend of Ladysmith at the last gasp, its fate trembling in the balance, and saved only by throwing the last dismounted cavalryman into the firing-line and by a desperate charge of the last three companies of infantry, soon established itself both in Ladysmith and without, and will not easily be shaken. As a matter of fact Ladysmith was never actually in any serious danger, whatever might have been the case if the storming parties had been up to their original strength and the supports had done their duty—in other words, if the Boers had been other than what they were. Neither the success of De Villiers's attack on Wagon Point nor the failure of the Devons' charge would have materially affected the result of the day. The permanent occupation of Wagon Hill itself, or even of the southern crest of Cæsar's Camp, would not have involved the fall of Ladysmith. These were in fact contingencies which the original scheme of defences contemplated, and however troublesome and uncomfortable the defence of the rear crest of Cæsar's Camp might have proved, the experience of the Berkshires at Colesberg shows that there was nothing to prevent its indefinite prolongation.

Criticism of Hamilton's conduct.

Not that this is meant to imply that White or Hamilton were mistaken in wishing to drive the Boers from the points they had occupied, though it has already been suggested that the desired result might have been more effectively attained by operations against the flank and rear of the Boer storming parties than by the mere piling up of reinforcements at the two ends of the hill itself. This

indeed is the only criticism of moment that can be made upon the conduct of the day's operations from headquarters. As regards Hamilton's share, the energy and vigour he infused into the defence of Wagon Hill, and the splendid example of personal courage which, as at Elandslaagte, he gave to his men at the critical moment, deserve every recognition. It may be said that he kept too exclusively to one end of the position, but his going off to Wagon Hill when the attack began was the right and obvious course, and between this and the receipt of Curran's message that everything was satisfactory on Cæsar's Camp there was no information suggesting that the situation there was serious enough to warrant his transferring his attention. In fact, short of attempting to take over the part more properly belonging to headquarters, it is doubtful whether Hamilton could have been better employed than where he was. The general charge against Hamilton of having neglected his defences has already been dealt with. Whether he might not have worried his subordinates into improving still further their positions on the crest-line is perhaps an open question. But it loses in importance when it is understood that the real defensive line lay behind, and that both on Cæsar's Camp, where it was hardly called into play, and on Wagon Hill, where its strength and disposition were fully tested, that line fulfilled all that was demanded of it. Indeed, in view of the numbers available, it is very doubtful if a different policy would have served its purpose as well. Short of a system of unscaleable breastworks and wire entanglements, which it was beyond the power of the men to construct, stronger intrenchments on the crest could not by themselves have stopped the Boer night attack, and their capture at any point, in the absence of defences behind, might have endangered the safety of the hill far more seriously than was ever actually the case.

After-effects of the fight.

Upon the Boers the effect of their failure was to create a profound depression and a firm resolve not to attempt another attack. The advocates of the waiting policy claimed that their views had been justified by the result, and all that the party of action could henceforth succeed in doing was to

withdraw as many men as possible from round Ladysmith to the more important operations which in a few days were to begin on the Tugela. But the strain of the long day of anxiety and the loss of life, to which British generals were still too unaccustomed, told no less upon the British commander. So far from being elated by his success he was only the more strongly impressed with the danger of the position, and on the 7th he informed Sir R. Buller that he would rather not call upon his men to move out of Ladysmith in order to co-operate with the relieving army, a message which Buller seems to have forthwith accepted as the last word on the subject. Accordingly from this date onwards, by mutual tacit consent of besiegers and besieged, relievers and repellers, Ladysmith ceases to be an active factor in the military situation, and becomes instead a cordon of observation, a struggle against hunger and sickness, a goal to be aimed at, a symbol and token of victory.

CHAPTER IX

THE OPERATIONS ON THE UPPER TUGELA

British inactivity after Colenso.

THE weeks that followed the battle of Colenso were spent by Sir R. Buller's army in almost complete inactivity. Buller himself, with the 4th and 5th Brigades, lay at Frere. The advanced camp at Chieveley, consisting of the 2nd and 6th Brigades, with the naval guns and the bulk of the mounted troops, the whole under Clery, kept touch with the enemy by long-range shelling of the Colenso trenches or by occasional small skirmishes. A small force of the newly raised Colonial Scouts were camped at Weenen, guarding the right flank, while strong detachments were posted at Estcourt and other points on the line down to Pietermaritzburg. No attempt was made during this period by Buller to harass the enemy and prepare an effective screen for his next advance by a system of really active cavalry reconnaissances carried out along the whole course of the Tugela, and, if possible, pushed across it. The mounted troops were, in fact, nearly all stationed on the open ground immediately in front of the enemy's centre. The great attack on Ladysmith on the 6th led, in the afternoon, to a feeble frontal demonstration against Colenso, whose evident lack of purpose could never for a moment have been concealed from the Boers. Fresh troops had meanwhile been steadily arriving, including artillery to replace the losses of Colenso, and the final concentration of the Fifth Division at Estcourt on January 8 brought the British field forces south of the Tugela to the respectable total of over 30,000 men. The members of the headquarters staff, whom Buller had left behind when he hurried across

to Natal, had rejoined him from Cape Town by the end of the year. Supplies and transport in abundance were accumulated at Frere, and everything was ready for the advance.

Boer inactivity. Weakness of Boer position.

The Boers had even less to show for the breathing space afforded by Colenso than their defeated enemy. Instead of devoting their whole energies to the capture of Ladysmith and the consequent liberation of an army large enough to take the offensive against Buller, they merely spent their time, as at Magersfontein, in improving and strengthening their trenches in preparation for a second frontal attack. A continuous line of trenches now ran from Robinson's Farm to Colenso on the left bank, while on the right Hlangwane was strengthened by carefully masked works, which were prolonged for some miles on the north side of the Gomba Spruit valley, the extreme Boer left resting on Monte Cristo Mountain. Meanwhile their forces were dwindling away as fast as the British forces were growing. By the end of the first week in January it is very doubtful if the whole Boer force in Natal exceeded 16,000 men. Of these some 8,000 under Joubert and Prinsloo sat round Ladysmith. Botha and Meyer with 6,000 occupied the Colenso trenches. About 1,000 burghers, the Free Staters under A. P. Cronje and the Transvaalers under Tobias Smuts and Ben Viljoen, were scattered along the heights on the left bank of the Upper Tugela from Schiet Drift at the western end of the Colenso heights to beyond Acton Homes. These were reinforced after January 6 by the now somewhat discredited Schalk Burger with the Carolina laager, who camped immediately behind the Spion Kop ridge. Scouting parties from this force were in the habit of crossing on to the hills south of the river, where they had dug a few trenches. Finally the Pietretief commando, some 500 strong, watched the Lower Tugela from Helpmakaar, while several hundred burghers were scattered about at various points along the line of communications. Except against a renewed frontal attack on Colenso, the Boer position in January was, if anything, weaker than it had been a month earlier.

March by Upper Tugela decided on.

The direction which his advance was to take had been settled by Buller from the moment that the renewal of

the attempt to relieve Ladysmith was decided on.* Though more than one of his senior officers, including Warren, urged a direct advance on Ladysmith by dislodging the Boer left on Hlangwane and Monte Cristo and forcing a passage opposite Pieter's Station, he himself had no doubt that the right course was to revert to the flank march by Potgieter's Drift on the Upper Tugela, which had so nearly been carried out in December.† The comparative advantages of the alternative flank marches by the Upper and the Lower Tugela have already been discussed. It is sufficient here to note that the march by the Upper Tugela was eminently feasible, but on the one condition that it was executed with speed and secrecy. The hills on the right bank commanded the crossing—the reconnaissances of the mounted troops had been sufficient to supply Buller with all the necessary information on this point—and, once across, only a single line of heights separated the relieving force from the open plain extending to Ladysmith. Potgieter's Drift was barely twenty-four miles from Frere. A well-devised scheme for putting Lyttelton's infantry brigade on mule-wagons and sending them with the whole cavalry by night to cross the drift and seize the heights beyond, following up this bold dash by the advance of the rest of the infantry, was laid before Buller, but rejected as too risky.

Buller's plan. Buller's own plan, as elaborated on the 8th after consultation with Warren, was very different. The whole of the force, with the exception of the 6th Brigade under Barton, which was to remain as a containing force at Chieveley, and of garrisons to be left at Frere and Estcourt, was to concentrate at Frere, and thence move by short stages to Springfield on the Little Tugela, sixteen miles away. The main object of this move, which was to take four days, was to cover the accumulation at Springfield of a depôt with seventeen days' supplies.‡ Five days in all were to be spent before the force

* See Sir R. Buller's evidence before the War Commission, 14963.

† See vol. ii., pp. 424–427.

‡ The transport arrangements, which were very ingeniously worked out, involved a series of double journeys—between Frere and the half-way depôt of Pretorius's Farm on the part of the supply park, and between Pretorius's Farm and Springfield on the part of the supply column, each of

was concentrated at Potgieter's Drift. After this Buller expected, according to his messages to White, to fight three actions, one for the crossing, a second for the possession of the heights beyond, and a third near Lancer's Hill at the entrance to the Long Valley, in which last action he could hope, before White's message of January 7, to enjoy the active co-operation of the Ladysmith garrison.* In order to complete the success of the operation Buller ordered a small, lightly-equipped column of some 300 Colonial Scouts under Colonel F. Addison, M.L.A., to leave Estcourt and Mooi River on January 11, and, marching through Zululand, to attack Helpmakaar and, if successful, blow up the railway at Waschbank, thus cutting the Boer communications at the very moment Buller hoped to break up the investment of Ladysmith. An obvious flaw in the plan, regarded as a turning movement, was the start from a point so close to the enemy as Frere. The whole advance to Springfield would have to be made across open ground and under the enemy's eyes. A general intent on considerations of strategy rather than those of convenience of transport would undoubtedly have tried to make use of the more difficult but more secluded road from Estcourt to the Upper Tugela. But the fact is that what Buller had in view was not a flank march at all, but that entirely different thing, a march to a flank preparatory to a subsequent frontal attack. For it is not the direction on the map that constitutes a flank march, but the surprising of the enemy's flank before he can take up a new front. In Buller's plan this essential element of surprise was entirely lacking. There was no attempt to conceal the movement, none to delude the enemy by skilful feinting, none to outwit him by rapidity of manœuvre. How little Buller troubled about mobility was shown by the enormous trans-

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these being composed of 160 ox-wagons and carrying four days' supply for the force. There was nothing wrong with these arrangements in themselves, but they should have followed upon the strategical operations and not have been allowed to dominate them.

* As a matter of fact, Buller could always have ordered White's co-operation, but from first to last he never seems to have made any attempt to exercise his authority over White, or even to make suggestions to him—excepting always the message after Colenso.

port, which included tents and other dispensable luxuries, and by the fact that 600 mounted men, nearly a quarter of the whole mounted force, were left with the garrisons at Chieveley and Frere. It will save confusion then if it is clearly understood from the first that no attempt to relieve Ladysmith by a flank march was ever made, but that the operations on the Upper Tugela were, strategically considered, frontal attacks from a base at Springfield. All Buller stood to gain by transferring his base to the Upper Tugela was a more favourable battleground for the purely tactical operation of forcing the passage of the river.

Composition of the force.

By the orders of January 8 the field force destined for the relief of Ladysmith was entirely reorganized. Hildyard's and Hart's Brigades (2nd and 5th) were constituted into the Second Division under Clery; the Fifth Division was altered by the substitution of Lyttelton's Brigade (4th) for Talbot Coke's (10th), and the latter was included in the corps troops. For the purposes of the march the force was divided in two. Clery, who was to start on the night of the 9th, was to command one half, consisting of his division, Dundonald's mounted brigade, and a proportion of the artillery and technical troops, and was to be responsible for the security of the half-way depôt at Pretorius's Farm with his infantry, while the mounted troops seized Springfield. Warren, in command of the rest, was to start on the following evening and march direct to Springfield.* The total strength of the force marching from Frere and Chieveley amounted to over 23,000 men of all arms, including about 2,000 mounted troops, seven field batteries and one howitzer battery, and ten naval guns.†

Jan. 10. The start; Dundonald seizes Potgieter's Drift.

Owing to the heavy rain which had fallen continuously

* The object of this subdivision of the force is not very clear, but it is of interest as foreshadowing that delegation of authority and disregard of the principles of military organization which were to be so strikingly displayed in the subsequent operations.

† Infantry: 2nd, 4th, 5th, 10th, and 11th Brigades; cavalry: 13th Hussars (divisional and corps cavalry), Royal Dragoons; mounted infantry: Composite Regiment, Thorneycroft's M.I., Bethune's M.I., South African Light Horse; artillery: 7th, 19th, 28th, 61st (howitzer), 63rd, 64th, 73rd and 78th Batteries, R.F.A.; naval guns: two 4·7-inch and eight 12-pounders; Colt gun-battery with the mounted brigade; engineers: 17th and 37th Companies, R.E., pontoon troop, telegraph section.

since the evening of the 8th, the night march was given up and the first troops started at an early hour on the 10th. Guns and wagons sank axle-deep in the mud. Trickling spruits had swollen into torrents which it required pontoons to bridge and treble teams to drag the wagons through. That night when the infantry reached Pretorius's Farm, the tail of the transport had scarcely cleared Frere Camp. Under the circumstances the start might well have been delayed a day or two longer. There was another reason in favour of delay which may, however, possibly have worked in the contrary direction. Lord Roberts was due to arrive at Cape Town on the 10th, and it might have been considered more advisable not to commit the Natal army to a series of important operations without consulting the new Commander-in-Chief. Meanwhile Dundonald had found the important bridge over the Little Tugela at Springfield unoccupied and intact. Informed by his scouts that there were no Boers between him and Potgieter's Drift, he promptly decided to exceed his orders (which were to await the arrival of Warren's force) and to push on in order to occupy Spearman's Hill, which, as he knew, commanded the approaches to the drift. His brigade, reduced by the withdrawal of the regular cavalry and Thorneycroft's, who were acting partly as divisional cavalry, partly as flank guard to the infantry at Pretorius's, only numbered about 1,000 men and the 64th Battery. Leaving 350 men and two guns to guard the bridge, he pushed on with the rest, and as night fell established himself on Spearman's Hill with Potgieter's Drift at his feet. A few Boers were seen on the far bank, and the little force spent an anxious night in expectation of an attack.

The position at Potgieter's.

Next morning showed the enemy in increased numbers busily intrenching the low heights some three miles beyond the drift. A party of the South African Light Horse swam the flooded river under fire and brought across the ferry pont, thus preventing, for the moment, any possibility of the enemy's crossing. Heliographic communication was secured with Ladysmith. Warren's troops meanwhile were ploughing their way through a sea of mud to Springfield, Lyttelton's brigade being sent forward to support Dundonald,

whom it joined on the morning of the 12th. That same morning Buller himself rode up to Spearman's Hill. A splendid panorama unfolded itself before him. From an elevation of 1,000 feet he found himself looking down into a vast oblong basin, through which the Tugela wound in tortuous curves. The height on which he stood formed the southern side of the basin, and ran practically along its whole length, sharply defined on the east by two detached flat-topped ridges called Swaartz Kop, at whose eastern foot lay Schiet Drift, and on the west gradually sinking down to the lower heights above Trichardt's Drift, some five miles away. To right and left the towering ramparts of Doorn Kop, 400 feet above him, and the long steep ridge of Spion Kop, joining its great whale-backed western summit to the two bold peaks at its eastern end, shut off the view. But in front the northern side of the basin was low and insignificant in comparison. From the eastern peak of Spion Kop the long Brakfontein ridge, 630 feet above the river at its highest point, curved round in a semicircle to isolated little Vaal Krantz, separated from the foot of Doorn Kop by a narrow strip of almost level ground. From the drift at Buller's feet the Ladysmith road ran up a gentle incline over the western end of Brakfontein, on to the level plain, and thence across the plain to where, in the far distance, twinkled the Ladysmith heliograph. There was the goal in sight. But between were the Boers already digging away for dear life along the crest of the ridge, and joined by fresh parties almost every hour. To dislodge them by hook or crook before their work was done, before their numbers were grown too strong, to overcome the one remaining obstacle to the success of the expedition, would, one might imagine, have called for almost any exertions, and have justified almost any risks. Buller was content to let them dig. For the present his one concern was the filling up of his supply depôt, now divided between Springfield and Spearman's. By the 15th that task would be completed, and Clery's troops, no longer required to guard the off-loading station at Pretorius's, could be marched up. Then it would be time to think of dealing with Brakfontein and the Boers.

Jan. 10–15. The Boers busy intrenching Brakfontein.

The British march was at once signalled to the Boer laagers from Doorn Kop. Its objective was clear enough, yet with the extraordinary slowness of the Boers in grasping a new strategical situation only the feeblest and most inadequate measures were taken, measures which would never have stopped a swift and determined advance on the part of Buller's army. Botha sent round 500 men from Colenso. Joubert urged Prinsloo to do something to strengthen his subordinate Cronje's positions, and the latter sent two field guns and 80 men. Even on the morning of the third day (January 12) it is doubtful if the whole Boer force opposite Buller exceeded 2,000 men. The only one who showed decision and military insight at the moment was President Kruger, who at once telegraphed to Botha to cross the river and fall upon the rear of Buller's columns. Botha, lacking the necessary audacity himself, or too conscious that his men lacked it, replied on the 12th that the Tugela was in flood, and that the force left at Chieveley was too strong. It was not till the 14th that Botha rode over to Brakfontein and made a careful inspection of the Boer intrenchments, whose defenders were by then reinforced to a strength of some 3,000 men, and were to be reinforced by nearly 1,000 more in the next two days. On his return to Colenso he was able to report with confidence to the President that the position was even better than that at Colenso, and that as long as the burghers did their duty Buller could not possibly succeed.

Weakness of the Boer position.

If Buller meant to repeat the tactics of Colenso, Botha was no doubt right. With its wings thrown forward on to Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, the latter in its turn covered by Doorn Kop, the Brakfontein position completely commanded the flat plain which any force crossing Potgieter's Drift would have to traverse. But, except as against a purely frontal attack in broad daylight, the position was by no means so favourable for the Boers. The passage of the Tugela, not only at Potgieter's, but at the drifts above and below it, was commanded by the British, who were thus in a far better position, whether for a night attack or for a combined flank and front attack at either end of the position, which was only strongly held and intrenched in the centre.

The dominating bush-covered heights in possession of the British enabled their naval guns to range over the Boer positions, and forced the Boers to keep their laagers several miles in rear, excepting only Schalk Burger's laager behind the steep reverse of Spion Kop. And lastly, Brakfontein and the rest of the Boer line were the last positions that could be held. There was no rallying position behind, and the knowledge of this was by no means encouraging to the burghers, who complained freely of the shortsightedness which had allowed the heights on the southern bank to be occupied by the enemy without a struggle. Botha, indeed, with the same sound instinct that led him to occupy Hlangwane, had urged the intrenchment and permanent occupation of these heights some time before. But the Free Staters had been reluctant to venture across the river, and Dundonald's prompt advance had prevented a possible reconsideration of the question.

Jan. 14. Buller decides to turn the position by Trichardt's.

Meanwhile, it was beginning gradually to dawn upon Buller that a direct advance from Potgieter's had become out of the question, and that some other alternative must be found. There were several open to him: a night attack; a crossing by Schiet Drift; a rolling up of the Brakfontein position from Vaal Krantz; the capture of Spion Kop; and, lastly, a turning movement to the west of Spion Kop, involving the dislodgment of the extreme right of the Boer line, thinly scattered along the Tabanyama or Rangeworthy heights, which extended north-westwards from Spion Kop towards Acton Homes. This last was the course towards which Buller inclined. On the afternoon of the 14th he instructed Warren to proceed to Trichardt's Drift next morning and reconnoitre it with a view to a crossing. On his return from the reconnaissance, Warren pronounced the crossing feasible, and suggested that it should be followed up by the capture of Spion Kop. To this suggestion Buller demurred. But he now made up his mind to attempt the turning movement by the left, and issued his orders that evening. Once again he broke up the command of his force into two portions. The 4th and 10th Brigades, with Bethune's Mounted Infantry, the 61st (howitzer) and 64th Batteries,

and the naval guns, were to form a containing force under Lyttelton. The turning movement itself he assigned to Warren, putting under him the Second Division and 11th Infantry Brigade, the mounted brigade and corps cavalry, and the rest of the field artillery.

Warren's written orders were not very precise.* He was to act according to circumstances, but it was suggested that he should continue to refuse his right and throw his left forward till he gained the open plain north of Spion Kop, thus taking the Brakfontein position in rear and rendering it untenable. In previous conversation, however, Buller had further elucidated his views by explaining that he expected Warren's left to envelop Bastion Hill, a bold salient, which, seen from Spearman's, seemed to mark the extreme western end of Tabanyama, but that his convoy would most probably proceed by the road which led from Trichardt's Drift past Fairview and Rosalie Farms over the nek separating Spion Kop from the eastern end of Tabanyama. Warren, therefore, had little reason to complain, either that the general purport of his operations was not made clear to him, or that he was denied a reasonable latitude in the manner of their execution. As regards the enemy Warren might have to meet, the orders estimated the total Boer force on the Upper Tugela at 7,000, of whom only 400 were on Warren's left, an estimate sufficiently near the facts for practical purposes.† Warren was to take with him supply for four days, which

Warren's instructions.

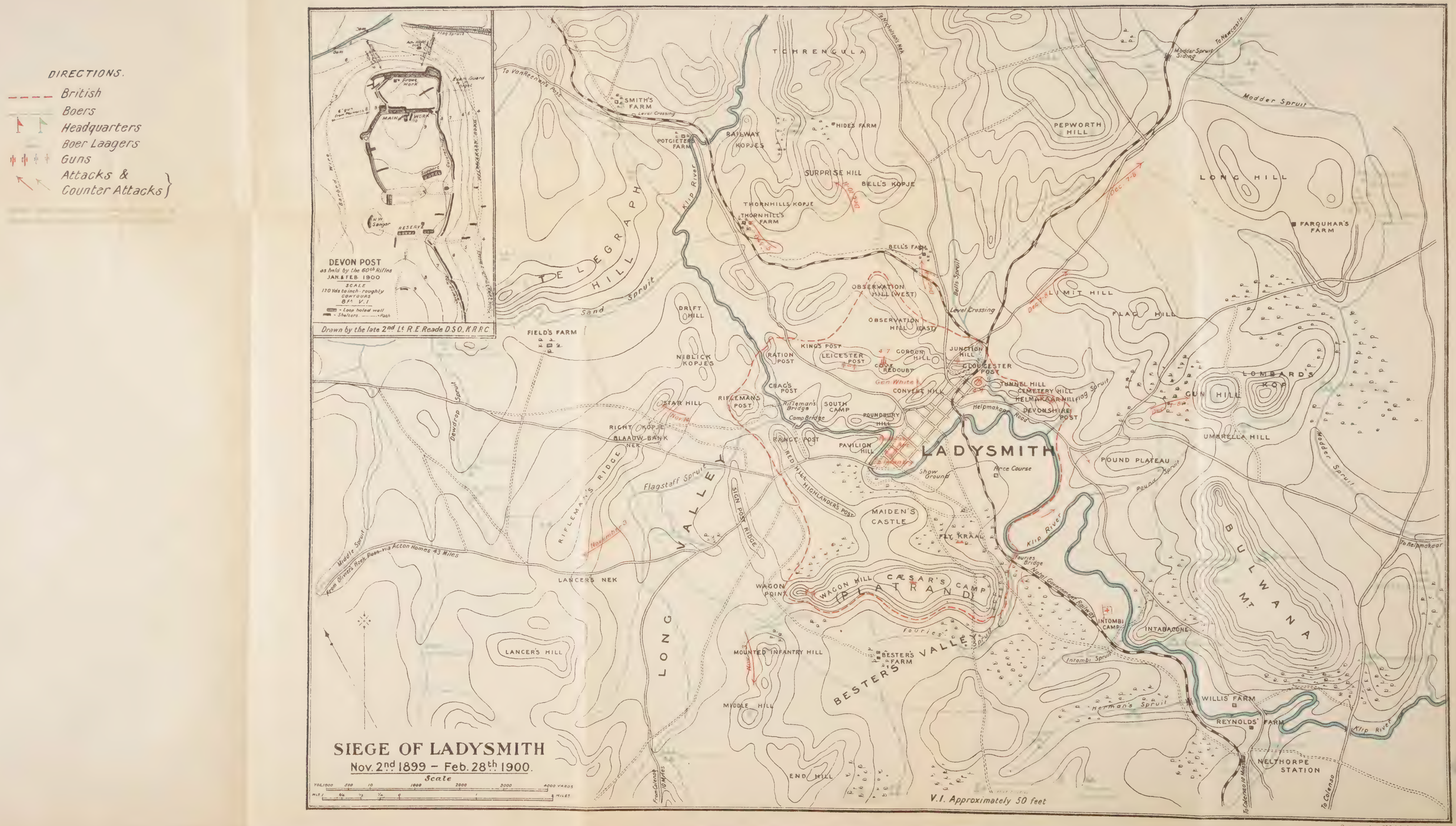
* See Spion Kop Despatches, Cd. 968, for the full text of these orders and generally for the events dealt with in this chapter.

† These were, no doubt, the figures furnished by Buller's intelligence, which rarely over-estimated the enemy by more than 50–100 per cent., an error not unnatural in view of the mobility and wide extensions of the Boers, and, as it was fairly consistently uniform, of no serious detriment to the operations, amounting practically to a regular allowance for the superiority of the Boer mounted rifleman over the British soldier. Buller, however, on occasion reckoned the Boer numbers much higher. Thus before starting on the 10th he telegraphed to the War Office that there were 46,000 Boers in Natal alone out of a field force of 120,000! At other times he even under-estimated them; thus on February 12 he telegraphed to Roberts that White was being contained by barely 2,000 Boers. Warren, on the other hand, seems to have been consistently haunted by the thought of the overwhelming numbers of the Boers, and to have had an even greater idea of their enterprise and aggressiveness.

Buller considered should be sufficient time for the execution of the task assigned to him. No tents were taken, and in other respects the transport was reduced to a reasonable scale. He was to start as soon as possible, and to make use of darkness to reach the drift unobserved. Meanwhile, in order to mask Warren's movements, and to be ready to co-operate afterwards, Lyttelton was to cross at Potgieter's Drift on the afternoon of the 16th, and establish himself just beyond on a line of low kopjes running right across the little loop of the river, at the end of which lay the drift.

Defects of Buller's plan: disorganization of the force.

No fault need be found with the tactical form of Buller's scheme. The flank attack was almost bound to succeed, provided always that it was carried out with rapidity and determination. These, indeed, were the essential conditions of success, and it does not appear that Buller made any effort to impress them upon Warren. But apart from the actual execution of the plan, there was one thing accompanying its inception which went far to make success difficult and to invite failure. That was the extraordinary redistribution of the force, with its splitting up of the command and its practical elimination of the commander-in-chief of the army and his whole directing staff. There was nothing in the operation itself which warranted this. Had the turning movement entrusted to Warren involved a distant march and the prolonged isolation of his column from the rest of the army, something might have been said for the division of the command, though even then it would have been more natural for Buller to have delegated the task of containing the Boers to a subordinate, and to have himself commanded the operations of the main body. But, as a matter of fact, the whole turning movement was of the most restricted character. At no time during its progress would the extreme flank of Warren's force be more than about eight miles from Potgieter's Drift. There was no reason why Buller should not himself have controlled the whole operation, which, flank attack and frontal demonstration together, would not, at the outside, cover a front half as extended as that on which French was so successfully operating round Colesberg. As it was, the redistribution reduced the whole


DIRECTIONS.
British
Boers
Headquarters
Boer Laagers
Guns
Attacks & Counter Attacks
DEVON POST
as held by the 60th Rifles
JAN. & FEB. 1900
SCALE
120 Yds to inch - roughly
CONTOURS
8 Ft. V.I.
Drawn by the late 2nd Lt. R.E. Reade D.S.O. K.R.R.C.
SIEGE OF LADYSMITH
Nov. 2nd 1899 – Feb. 28th 1900.
Scale
V.I. Approximately 50 feet
LADYSMITH
TELEGRAPH HILL
LONG VALLEY
BESTER'S VALLEY
BULWANA MT.
TCHRENGULA
SMITH'S FARM
POTGIETERS FARM
RAILWAY KOPJES
HIDES FARM
SURPRISE HILL
BELL'S KOPJE
THORNHILLS KOPJE
THORNHILL'S FARM
BELL'S FARM
PEPWORTH HILL
LONG HILL
FARQUHAR'S FARM
LIMIT HILL
FLAG HILL
OBSERVATION HILL (WEST)
OBSERVATION HILL (EAST)
DRIFT HILL
FIELD'S FARM
NIBLICK KOPJES
KINGS POST
RATION POST
LEICESTER POST
GORDON HILL
COVE REDOUBT
JUNCTION HILL
GLOUCESTER POST
TUNNEL HILL
CEMETERY HILL
HELMAKAAR HILL
DEVONSHIRE POST
CONVENT HILL
CRAG'S POST
RIFLEMAN'S POST
SOUTH CAMP
POUNDBURY HILL
STAR HILL
RIGHT KOPJE
BLAAUW BANK NEK
RANGE POST
PAVILION HILL
RED HILL
HIGHLANDER'S POST
MAIDEN'S CASTLE
FLY KRAAL
RIFLEMAN'S RIDGE
SIGN POST RIDGE
LANCER'S NEK
LANCER'S HILL
WAGON POINT
WAGON HILL
CÆSAR'S CAMP (PLATRAND)
MOUNTED INFANTRY HILL
BESTER'S FARM
MIDDLE HILL
END HILL
POUND PLATEAU
UMBRELLA HILL
GUN HILL
LOMBARD'S KOP
INTOMBI CAMP
INTABACONE
WILLIS FARM
REYNOLDS' FARM
NELTHORPE STATION
Klip River
Sand Spruit
Flagstaff Spruit
Dewdrop Spruit
Middle Spruit
Modder Spruit
Modder Spruit Siding
Bells Spruit
Helpmakaar Road
Flag Spruit
Pound Spruit
Intombi Spruit
Herman's Spruit
Fouries Spruit
Natal Government Railway
Fouries Bridge
Camp Bridge
Riflemans Bridge
Level Crossing
Show Ground
Race Course
To Van Reenen's Pass
To Nicholson's Nek
To Newcastle
To Helpmakaar
To Colenso
To Colenso 10 Miles
From Colenso 10 Miles
From Oliver's Hoek Pass via Acton Homes 43 Miles
Nov. 14
November 3
Dec. 5
Dec. 7-8
Dec. 7-8
Dec. 11-12
Dec. 7-8
Dec. 7-8
Dec. 7-8
Dec. 7-8
Nov. 3
Nov. 14
Gen White
Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

organization of the force to chaos. On the one side, Buller, with the entire staff of the original South African Field Force, was to sit apart, inactive, and await events. On the other, Warren, with the ordinary staff of an infantry division, was to attempt to carry on the command of a large mixed force of all arms, including among its units a complete infantry division, with divisional general and staff, to look after a large convoy and superintend the crossing of a considerable river, and, not least, to plan and execute a series of important tactical operations over badly-mapped and unreconnoitred country.

Possible reasons for Buller's action.

At the motives which influenced Buller thus virtually to abdicate his command and to disorganize his force, it is only possible to guess. The chief one, judging by similar performances on other occasions, was no doubt nothing more than a complete ignorance or disregard of the elementary principles of scientific organization and of staff work essential to the handling of a large body of troops in the field. It is possible, too, that his confidence in his own leadership in the field had not yet fully recovered from the shock of Colenso. Lastly, it is difficult to restrain the surmise that Buller, annoyed at the way in which the War Office had pushed forward Warren, perhaps even afraid that, in case of another failure, they might appoint Warren to supersede him, was anxious to put the quality of the much-vaunted South African general to the test. If so, the test was hardly a fair one. Whatever Warren's defects as a general, it is only just to acknowledge at the outset that his position was difficult and awkward in the extreme. In command of a large force, without the staff to direct it,* responsible for the main operations of the army, and yet not free to choose his own course, thrown upon his own resources, and yet liable to constant interference, he would have had to be a soldier of the first rank to have been certain of compassing success. What he was, the narrative of the operations themselves will show.

* Warren did apply to Buller for an increase of staff, a suggestion to which the latter only replied that he had got on quite well himself before his staff arrived, eventually, however, allowing Warren to take any regimental officers whom their commanding officers were ready to spare, with the result that none were to be procured.

Jan. 16. Diversion at Potgieter's; Warren to Trichardt's.

On the afternoon of the 16th all was activity once more. The naval 4·7's were brought into position on the western part of Spearman's Hill, known as Mount Alice, and the 12-pounders on a plateau below it, and opened fire against the frowning intrenchments on Brakfontein. At 5.30 P.M. the Rifle Brigade and Scottish Rifles crossed the Tugela, some ferried across by the pont, others wading the drift, which was running armpit deep, and, meeting with no opposition, established themselves at dusk in the little kopjes beyond—known afterwards as the Maconochie Kopjes—where the howitzers joined them at midnight. The movement succeeded, as it was meant to, in diverting the enemy's attention from the real attack. They had seen, on the previous day, Clery's division marching to Springfield, and knew that the blow must fall somewhere before long. When, therefore, word went round that night that the British were across at Potgieter's, all doubts were put to rest, and the Boers flocked to man the Brakfontein trenches in confident anticipation of a second Colenso, little thinking that behind the hills on the right bank the main body was already on its way to a wholly unsuspected destination. Marching all the afternoon and evening, Warren's infantry reached the low hills within a mile of Trichardt's Drift by 12.30 A.M., where they found the mounted brigade waiting for them.

Warren's opportunity.

Now, if ever, was Warren's opportunity for a signal and immediate success. He had stolen a march on the enemy, and only the river and four miles, at the most, of uphill separated him from the crest, whose capture meant the fulfilment of his task. The drift, it was true, was still deep and rapid from the recent flood. But it was not unfordable with the help of a rope, and to reach the crest first was a stake worth running far greater risk to win than the off-chance of drowning a few of his men.* Even if the night crossing was too difficult, and the men required rest, a start could have

* It was part of the general incapacity to realize the meaning of war that British generals in South Africa almost invariably shrank from even the most insignificant losses outside of a general action, and preferred to waste precious hours, or forego invaluable information, sooner than risk a few lives.

been made with the first faint glimmering of light, and the mounted troops hurried forward to the heights, supported after daybreak by the infantry and as many of the guns as could be got over. Fortune would, as usual, have favoured the bolder course that morning, for a pall of mist and cloud hung heavy on Spion Kop and Tabanyama for some hours after daylight. When the position was gained, as much of the transport could have been brought over as was required to keep the men going, on half rations if necessary. But such a bold dash, justified, if not, indeed, rendered imperative, by the small scale of the whole turning movement, was no part of the scheme as contemplated by Buller. Still less did it enter into Warren's calculations. Warren, indeed, seems to have started upon his task completely dominated by two convictions. The first was that the Boers were already established in overwhelming numbers at every point from the Drakensberg to Colenso, and that any rapid advance or wide flank movement which should cause him to lose touch, even for an instant, with Lyttelton and the long-range guns on his right, would mean the immediate envelopment and destruction of his force. The other was that his primary and paramount military duty was to look after his ox-wagons. From first to last he seems to have treated the problem before him as the taking of a convoy round Spion Kop by one of two possible roads, the part played by his troops being to force a way for it in front or to protect its flanks on the march. The conception is one which not unnaturally develops in petty expeditions against savages, but it is a fatal one for serious warfare. In any case, the last thing that seems to have occurred to Warren was that there was any occasion for desperate hurry.

Jan. 17. Pontoon thrown across at Trichardt's.

It was not till 6 A.M. that Warren took down Major Irvine, R.E., commanding the pontoon troop, and with him proceeded to reconnoitre a place for the bridge. A spot was chosen a quarter of a mile above the drift, where there was an island in midstream. At 8 A.M. work was begun, and the pontoons were slid with some difficulty down the steep banks, over twenty feet high, into the water. Meanwhile, a patrol of the Imperial Light Horse had drawn fire from three or

four Boers posted in Wright's Farm, half a mile from the drift on the left bank. Up to this the artillery had been kept carefully concealed, but Warren now ordered two batteries to open fire on the farm. The Boers went away, but for over an hour the guns wasted ammunition in searching all the approaches to the drift. The West Yorks and King's Own were ferried across while the bridge was building. At 11 A.M. it was completed, and Woodgate's brigade crossed, followed later by Hart's brigade and the mounted troops, the latter crossing by the drift. By 2 P.M. ramps were cut in the steep banks, enabling the artillery to begin crossing. At 7 P.M. a second bridge for the heavy traffic had been completed, and for the next twenty-six hours the passing over of wagons went on uninterruptedly.

Lyttelton's feint. Boer slowness in reinforcing Tabanyama.

Soon after daylight that morning the Boers on Brakfontein had observed Lyttelton's infantry advancing to the attack. At the same time the naval guns and howitzers opened a heavy fire. Crouching in their trenches, patiently waiting for infantry or guns to come within range of their rifles, the Boers may just have heard, but can have paid little attention to, the sound of Warren's batteries in action at Trichardt's Drift. Even when the news of what was happening there reached them, and when they saw Lyttelton's battalions rising up and returning to their bivouac, they scarcely realized that they were being detained by a mere demonstration while the real attack was developing elsewhere. A few mounted their ponies and rode round to Tabanyama. But to all intents and purposes, the positions opposite Warren were not reinforced till the following day, when several hundred men arrived from Ladysmith and began intrenching themselves. Nor was it till the morning of the 18th that any organized direction of the defences on that wing was undertaken. On receipt of the news of Warren's crossing, Kruger had telegraphed to Botha, cancelling the leave to visit his family for which he had just applied, and ordering him to take up the command of the right wing on the Upper Tugela. Receiving the news late that evening at Colenso, Botha at once rode off with 300 men, and, arriving before daybreak on the 18th, immediately

proceeded to inspect the positions in company with Generals Schalk Burger and A. P. Cronje.

Against an enemy capable of acting with any promptitude, the Boers would have been helpless. But in Buller and Warren they had opponents with whom it was safe to take things easily. Nothing was further from Warren's mind on the 17th than an attempt to occupy Tabanyama. He was content to secure a bridge-head, and, for that purpose, Hart's and Woodgate's brigades were pushed forward about a mile up the hill, where they took up a line of outposts covering the crossing. In the course of the morning, Buller, after watching the development of Lyttelton's demonstration from his headquarters on Spearman's Hill, rode over to Trichardt's and joined Warren, who was sitting on the low hills above the drift on the right bank and watching Woodgate's advance. Most of the day he sat there, and certainly, as yet, he showed no signs of fretting under Warren's inactivity. That the operations should wait till the convoy was over probably seemed quite as natural to him as to Warren. After all, what Warren was doing at Trichardt's was only an exact repetition of what Buller had done at Potgieter's. To realize that the same opportunity was again being given to the enemy to reinforce and strengthen his position, and thus alter the whole situation on which the British plan was based, required an effort of the imagination of which neither Buller nor Warren seem to have been capable. To Lord Roberts, indeed, at Cape Town, the situation was clear enough. The only word of advice he ventured to give throughout the whole of these operations was contained in a brief message sent on the 16th, laying stress on the supreme importance of speed:—

Buller and Warren at Trichardt's; Roberts's message.

> "It is, I am sure, needless for me to urge the importance of there being no delay on the road. Rapidity of movement is everything against an enemy so skilful in strengthening defensive positions."

On the 18th, as on the 17th, Warren did nothing beyond superintending the crossing of the transport and carrying out a short reconnaissance towards Fairview Farm. Meanwhile,

Jan. 18. Warren at Trichardt's; Dundonald pushes on.

soon after 7 A.M., Dundonald started off with his brigade and pushed westward, keeping behind the low hills which fringe the left bank of the river. At 11 A.M. he reported to Warren that the road to Acton Homes, which he was following, would be practicable for the force and less exposed than the road which ran immediately under Tabanyama. Leaving the Royals and Thorneycroft's holding points along the hills to secure his communications, he proceeded to explore further. This was not at all what Warren had meant him to do. The main function of cavalry, as Warren conceived it, was to serve as camp-guard, and, seized with a sudden fear lest the oxen grazing round the camp should be "swept away," he ordered Dundonald to send back 500 men. Sending back the Royals, Dundonald pushed on, and by 2 P.M. the head of his little force was abreast of Acton Homes.

And surprises Boers near Acton Homes.

A small party of Harrismith burghers with a gun had been posted on this flank for some days. But in consequence of Warren's crossing they were reinforced on the morning of the 18th by some 200 burghers under Field-Cornets Opperman, of Pretoria, and Mentz, of Heilbron. The newcomers had just crossed the ridge west of Tabanyama when they spied Dundonald's main body. They promptly trotted forward down the road to seize some low kopjes commanding the way to Acton Homes. But they had failed to observe the Composite Regiment, who were acting as advanced guard. Major Graham promptly galloped his men to the kopjes and established them there in readiness. On came the unsuspecting burghers and would have ridden right up to the British but for the premature fire of some excited irregular. Turning about, under a furious fusillade, the Boers galloped away, a small party taking up a position on a hillock in rear, where, after fighting pluckily for an hour, they surrendered.*

Dundonald asks for support.

The situation in which Dundonald found himself was capable of being turned to great strategic advantage. Right before and below him lay the hamlet of Acton Homes with the road running through it. To his right front lay the

* The Boer loss was 12 killed, including Field-Cornet Mentz, 10 wounded, and 23 prisoners.

western end of Tabanyama, at that moment unoccupied and unintrenched, but within easy reach of the Boers. To his left front was a high hill forming the other side of the Acton Homes defile, and commanding alike the defile and the flank of Tabanyama. Had Dundonald been assured of speedy support, both of infantry and artillery, it would not have been a very dangerous undertaking to seize the hill that night, even though his force on the spot now amounted to barely 800 men. An enveloping attack on Tabanyama next morning would have enabled Warren to carry out Buller's main idea, while the mounted brigade, swinging round the flank, might have been in Ladysmith as soon as the infantry reached the rear of Spion Kop. So thought Dundonald, and sent back an urgent request for reinforcements to enable him to push on and get into Ladysmith.

Warren refuses.

This was too much for Warren. He had followed up his message about the oxen with several others, forbidding Dundonald to proceed any farther, apparently without the slightest effect. He was growing angrier and angrier. The notion that he should now change the plans he had already made for the attack, and march his troops seven miles to his flank at the instance of a disobedient subordinate seemed to him preposterous. Dundonald's disobedience, indeed, probably loomed far larger in his mind than the situation created by it, though in any case the operation suggested was entirely contrary to Warren's peculiar conceptions of warfare. Never for a moment realizing the chance of victory Dundonald's trifling success had a second time brought within his grasp, he only regarded the whole business as an unfortunate complication. He stopped the supply wagons on their way to the mounted troops' bivouac, and replied to Dundonald: "Our objective is not Ladysmith; our objective is to effect junction with Sir R. Buller's force and then await orders from him"; following this with another message, again forbidding him to move forwards. Warren's own plan was for a moonlight attack by Woodgate's brigade on the near crest-line of Tabanyama, the position being reported to him as too strong for direct assault by daylight. But on closer inspection Woodgate thought better of the plan, and Warren, influenced

partly by the fact that all the baggage was not yet across, allowed it to drop.

Jan. 19. Warren's hesitations.

The abandonment of the night attack, combined with anxiety for Dundonald's safety, now led Warren to change his mind, and to decide to move westwards with the idea both of supporting Dundonald and of feeling round for the Boer flank as suggested by Buller, possibly even of going round by Acton Homes after all. At 2 A.M. on the 19th he ordered a trestle bridge to be made over the Venter's Spruit, two miles along the road followed by Dundonald, and the road beyond to be improved. At 5 A.M. he started off with his whole force, Hildyard's brigade leading, and Hart's and Woodgate's brigades on the flank, covering the precious convoy without which Warren did not dream of moving a step. At the spruit the crossing of the Tugela was beginning to be repeated on a small scale. Meanwhile, Warren rode on to reconnoitre the Acton Homes road. A glance at the open ground, which might be commanded by Boer long-range guns, was enough to put out of his head any idea he may have had of moving by that route. A report from Dundonald to say that the Acton Homes road was now strongly defended, and a message signalled from Ladysmith that 1,500–2,000 Boers had been seen moving in the direction of Acton Homes, confirmed his decision. Hildyard's brigade and the baggage were ordered back across the spruit, and the scene of jumbled confusion at the drift and afterwards at the bivouac was a clear indication, alike to the puzzled troops and to Buller, who was again on the spot in his capacity of umpire at manœuvres, of the feebleness of purpose and indecision with which operations were being conducted. Meanwhile, Warren had sent for Dundonald to see him at Venter's Spruit. A stormy interview took place. Dundonald again pressed the merits of his outflanking movement and asked for a battery and the return of the Royals. Warren explained his view of the function of the mounted troops, which was to keep within half a mile of the infantry on both flanks, and between them and the enemy. The meeting grew more and more heated, and ended by Warren's further depriving Dundonald of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry, and, in con-

clusion, telling him he could do anything he liked with the remainder, as long as he kept in close to the flank. With difficulty Dundonald got permission to stay where he was till next morning. For the rest of the operations the mounted brigade was treated by Warren as practically non-existent.

He finally decides to seize the east end of Tabanyama.

Warren had now spent three whole days on the banks of the Tugela. Beyond getting his convoy over the river, and shifting his bivouac to Venter's Spruit, he had in this time accomplished absolutely nothing. In another day the supply wagons would be empty, and would have to be sent back over the river again. That evening he called together his senior officers (except Dundonald) and explained the situation as it presented itself to him. There were, he pointed out, two roads along which it was possible to move wagons, and along which, therefore, the advance would have to be made. Of these the Acton Homes road was, in his opinion, out of the question. It was too long, too far from the rest of the army, in fact altogether too dangerous. And in any case there were not enough supplies left for so long a march. There remained the Fairview road straight before them. This Warren decided was the only possible way, and even by this road he was now convinced that the convoy could not go as long as the Boers held Spion Kop, whose occupation, he considered, was strictly excluded from the scope of his operations by Buller's orders. The only solution of the difficulty was, after capturing the Tabanyama ridge, to send back the wagons, letting the men take as much food as they could carry in their haversacks, and then to fight his way across the plain behind Spion Kop. The capture of the ridge was therefore the task immediately before them, and Warren proceeded to expound his plan for gaining a footing upon the ridge, beginning at its eastern end.

His vague message to Buller.

Warren's council of war assented to his conclusions. No one seems to have raised a voice against the deliberate sacrifice of the opportunity for attacking the enemy's exposed flank in favour of a frontal attack on an intrenched and unreconnoitred position. No one seems to have suggested that the Acton Homes route might still be feasible if supplies were first replenished, or that taking the convoy the whole

way round was no more essential for an enveloping attack on Tabanyama than for the frontal attack proposed. At the end of the meeting Warren communicated his decision to Buller in the following vague message:—

"I find there are only two roads by which we could possibly get from Trichardt's Drift to Potgieter's on the north of the Tugela—one by Acton Homes, the other by Fairview and Rosalie; the first I reject as too long, the second is a very difficult road for a large number of wagons unless the enemy is thoroughly cleared out. I am, therefore, going to adopt some special arrangements which will involve my stay at Venter's laager for two or three days. I will send in for further supplies and report progress."

Buller the disinterested critic.

Buller had already seen that day that things were not going well, and Warren's message can hardly have served to allay his anxieties. He may well by now have regretted his decision to intrust so large a part of his force to a subordinate of whose capacities he had had no experience. Openly to supersede Warren at this moment, even before he had brought his troops into action, was, perhaps, a stronger step than the circumstances warranted. But what Buller could do was to exercise a closer supervision over Warren, to exert a more direct control over his operations, and gradually to resume his own proper position as commander of the force. No such idea, however, seems to have occurred to him, and so far from reasserting his authority he for the next two days confined himself more closely than ever to his self-imposed part of the disinterested critic. Occasional criticism and casual suggestions he allowed himself, but of direct interference he had for the present washed his hands.

Description of Tabanyama.

Seen from the Tugela the southern face of the mountainous plateau known as Tabanyama presents a front of over three miles, extending from Bastion Hill on the west to the valley which, running up from Trichardt's Drift, divides Tabanyama from Spion Kop. Of this face the western portion falls abruptly into the Tugela valley in a line of bold buttresses and deep re-entrants. A still deeper re-entrant running into the very heart of the plateau separates these from the eastern portion, which descends more gradually

towards Fairview Farm and the river. It is up this easier slope that the road makes its way to the crest. Once on the plateau it passes just east of a slight rise which, under the name of Three Tree Hill, was to play a prominent part in the operations, and then crosses the broad saddle between the main plateau of Tabanyama and its easternmost spur—known to the troops as Green Hill—which projected towards Spion Kop. From the southern edge the plateau extends with an average width of 2,500–3,000 yards, reduced to barely 800 yards by the deep re-entrant. Unlike most South African plateaux, however, the top of Tabanyama is not flat, but slopes away from a main ridge, or backbone. At its eastern end, where it rises to a height of 1,200 feet above the river, or some 300 feet above the southern edge, this ridge is quite close to the steep northern edge of the mountain. Its less distinct western continuation runs, sinking gradually, across the middle of the plateau till it rises again in a clearly-marked hill, a mile north of Bastion Hill. This hill, with its north-western spur, forms the extreme western end of Tabanyama.

Warren's plan of attack.

Warren's plan was to establish himself on Tabanyama by working up along the spurs on both sides of the deep re-entrant. He already held the lower slopes leading up to Three Tree Hill. From there his artillery could command the slopes across the re-entrant and facilitate their occupation. A battery brought on to these western slopes would in its turn bring a flanking fire to bear on Three Tree Hill itself, and assist in its capture, whereupon the process would be repeated for the next stage in the advance. The whole operation was to be executed deliberately, with abundant artillery preparation and a liberal use of artificial cover. Assuming the necessity of the frontal attack the conception of a gradual advance by a series of alternately supporting fire positions was a perfectly sound one, and, if the men could be induced to intrench at each stage, there was no reason why it should involve heavy losses. Its only weak point was that, owing to the absence of any really vigorous attempt to reconnoitre the ground, Warren could neither tell whether the Boers really held the crest-line in force, nor how far the occupation of Three Tree Hill and the next spur to

the west would make a further advance any easier. Following the example of delegation set by Buller he intrusted the attack to Clery, assigning to him the 5th and 11th Brigades, already on the lower slopes, and the whole of the artillery. Hildyard's brigade was to guard the baggage, the Royals were to watch the right flank. Dundonald was on the left.

Boers reinforce Tabanyama.

We must now turn for a moment to the other side of the hill. Warren's crossing at Trichardt's, when at last its purport was realized by the Boers, had caused no little anxiety in the laagers. Yet scarcely had Botha arrived on the spot to encourage the burghers and set them at work intrenching on Tabanyama when the news came of the presence of Dundonald's victorious horsemen round their flank at Acton Homes, and practically in possession of the key to the whole of their positions. The Boers were not in good spirits on the night of the 18th. Without firing a shot they had been outmanœuvred and forced back on their last line of defence. And now their exposed right flank was seriously threatened. Not a few of the burghers grumbled freely at the inefficiency of their generals and prophesied defeat as soon as the British should attack. Only a little was wanted, in the opinion of impartial observers, to turn discouragement into demoralization. But Botha rose to the occasion. He had immediately on arrival succeeded in getting Schalk Burger to send across some 500 volunteers from the positions opposite Potgieter's, and had telegraphed to Ladysmith for further reinforcements. He might have telegraphed for a week but for the magic effect of Dundonald's movement upon the Free Staters, who at once realized the danger to the short and easy line of retreat by Acton Homes to Olivier's Hoek on which they had always counted in case of emergency. Early next morning (19th) several hundred Free Staters rode from their camps round Ladysmith towards Acton Homes. These, as soon as it became evident that the British flank attack was a mere flash in the pan, Botha was able to utilize for the main defence of Tabanyama, for which by the evening of the 19th he probably had nearly 2,000 burghers available.

Botha's dispositions for the defence.

In his choice of a defensive position Botha avoided the southern crest of the hill for the same reason for which

Warren thought its capture feasible, namely, its liability to outflanking artillery fire. Like Ian Hamilton, in his original scheme for the defence of Cæsar's Camp, and with even better reason, he decided to make use of the field of fire furnished by the broad summit of the hill as his principal defence. His line of trenches was laid out on the summit of the main ridge along the rear and centre of the plateau, its left resting on the Green Hill next to Spion Kop and its right on the hill north of Bastion Hill. This right flank, indeed, was the weak point, for it was entirely in the air, but Botha seems to have trusted in a British general's predilection for frontal attacks. Everywhere the trenches commanded a smooth sloping glacis varying from 600 to over 2,000 yards in width. Except on the side of Three Tree Hill, where guns could come up the road, the trenches were not easily accessible to field artillery, and could only be reached from the plain by howitzers or naval guns. Some of Botha's own few guns had, indeed, owing to the position of the ridge, to be posted in the same line as the riflemen, but for this defect the gunners compensated by extra work on their emplacements. To bring a closer and more converging fire on the British, should they attack at one end of the position only, a series of less elaborate schanzes was thrown forward, along a slight ridge in front of the centre of the main line of trenches, almost to the edge of the glacis. The Boer position thus took the shape of an elongated figure 3, and it was in the eastern loop of this that the next day's fighting was mainly concentrated.

Jan. 20. Unopposed advance to the crest.

At 3 A.M. on the 20th the troops moved off. Clery gave Woodgate's brigade the order to attack, keeping Hart in reserve. Woodgate detailed the Lancashire Fusiliers and York and Lancasters to attack the western hill and took the Royal Lancasters and South Lancashires up the Fairview road. Before long he discovered, what energetic scouting might have found out from the first, that the hills were not held. He pushed on, and by 6 A.M. occupied Three Tree Hill and the plateau sloping away for half a mile to the east of it, in other words the whole breadth of the south-eastern spur. Here the men were told to intrench while the artillery came up. The 78th Battery, escorted by the Connaughts

and three companies Inniskilling Fusiliers, withdrawn from Hart's brigade, took position on the right. The 19th, 28th, and 63rd were posted round Three Tree Hill, their muzzles pointing outwards like the spokes of a wheel. The left advance halted three-quarters of the way up their hill.

The generals examine the position.

Clery and Warren now came up to Three Tree Hill, and for the first time the exact position and extent of the enemy's intrenchments stood revealed to them. There could be no mistaking the vast semicircle of clearly-marked sangars and trenches stretching round in front and above them. Warren's carefully-planned dispositions for capturing the crest of the spurs gave no help for an advance across the 2,000 yards or more of sloping glacis into which these spurs were now seen to merge. New dispositions were required, and there was ample time to reconnoitre and move some of the troops while the position on Three Tree Hill was being strengthened. The obvious way of carrying out Warren's principle of progressive outflanking movements was to hold on to the ground gained, and then, by moving westwards and successively occupying the spurs and re-entrants of the crest, to outflank the advanced right of the Boers, which was entirely unsupported, and would probably have fallen back after very little fighting. Continued along the western crest-line to the hill north of Bastion Hill—Hildyard's brigade and the mounted troops being brought up for the purpose—and supported by cross-fire from the long re-entrant, such a movement would in turn have outflanked the right of the Boer main position and have speedily rendered the rest untenable. A possible alternative was to send up to the head of the long ravine as many troops as could find cover in it, and from there attempt to rush the trenches, 500–600 yards away, if not by daylight then at dusk or before dawn.

Clery decides to attack up one spur.

Neither of these alternatives seem to have commended themselves to Clery, to whom, as a reputed master of tactics, Warren had given over the charge of his operations. The only fruit of Clery's inspection of the position was the decision to do nothing with the infantry on Three Tree Hill, but to advance with the rest of his force along the summit of the western spur against the trenches on the Boer right.

This attack was to be carried out by Hart, whose command was now made to consist of the two battalions of Woodgate's brigade already on the western spur, and the two and a half battalions of his own brigade which had not been sent away to join Woodgate.* The summit of the western spur, whose shape was not unlike that of a somewhat splayed thumb, was pretty freely strewn with outcrops of scattered rocks, furnishing a certain amount of cover. This was apparently the chief factor in determining Clery's plan, if indeed it deserved the name. But the spur was too narrow to permit of more than a portion of Hart's force deploying; and it narrowed still further, to barely 400 yards, at its junction with the main plateau, where the advance would come under a deadly converging fire. Here, too, the cover practically ceased, leaving half a mile of bare glacis still to be crossed.

7 A.M.–3 P.M. Advance up the western spur.

At 7 A.M. the batteries on Three Tree Hill opened fire at 2,500–3,000 yards' range on the Boer sangars, which presented a perfect target. The Boers, crouching securely behind the thick stone walls or breast-deep trenches, made no reply till half an hour later, when the advance of two companies of the Royal Lancasters to occupy a small kopje north-east of Three Tree Hill drew a crashing volley from all the eastern sangars. From this time the rifle-fire was continuous, though as yet no troops were within effective range. At 10 A.M. the 7th and 73rd Batteries came up to join the rest, and the intensity of the bombardment was redoubled. At 11 A.M. Hart began his advance, the Lancashire Fusiliers leading on the right and the York and Lancasters on the left, each with a front of two companies. The Borders and Dublin Fusiliers supported; the Inniskilling Fusiliers were in reserve. Occasional rocky outcrops at first offered good cover—too good, thought some of the officers, who found their men inclined to ensconce themselves behind it and fire away at extreme ranges instead of pushing on. Gradually the open spaces to be crossed

* This mixing up of units was the result of Clery's original dispositions, in which he made one brigadier responsible for the whole of the first attack instead of making both brigadiers responsible both for the first attack and for the supports, each on his own hill. The units withdrawn from Hart's brigade never rejoined him throughout the whole of the Spion Kop operations.

became wider and casualties began to come freely. The Lancashire Fusiliers relate that at one spot marked by a clump of white flowers seven men in succession fell in attempting to pass. Slowly but steadily the advance crept forward. Maxims were dragged up on to the crest to support the fire of the infantry. But the advantage rested with the Boers, who, invisible themselves and spread over a wide front, were firing into the exposed and crowded ranks of the attack. At 1.15 two Boer guns and a pom-pom which had lain low all the morning suddenly opened on Three Tree Hill, scattering the crowd of generals, staff officers, and spectators assembled there. For twenty minutes or so they engaged in an artillery duel with the six batteries on the hill, and then turned aside and devoted their attention to Hart's advance, shifting from time to time to avoid the attentions of the British gunners, but never silenced.

By 3 P.M. Hart's leading battalions had reached the very end of the cover, a few hundred rifles driven as a wedge into a great circle of converging fire. On the left the firing-line of the York and Lancaster got cover within 600 yards of the trenches, but the second line lay six deep behind some scanty rocks. Before this Hart had sent round two of their companies under the crest to occupy the next buttress to his left, whence he hoped to bring a flanking fire to bear on the trenches. This move, in consequence of certain developments taking place elsewhere, was executed with unexpectedly little opposition. On the right, meanwhile, the Lancashire Fusiliers were crowded together on a front where not 100 men could use their rifles. Hart now brought up his supports, himself leading the Borders on the right, while Colonel Cooper brought up the Dublins on the left. Sweeping up the firing-line, Hart pressed on to within 600–700 yards of the trenches, where the ground fell away absolutely coverless in front of him. The time had now come for the charge. A message was sent back to the gunners, and the rate of fire was promptly redoubled. A grass fire, lit by the shells, filled the amphitheatre with rolling masses of smoke. The roar of musketry swelled louder and louder, for each side knew that the critical moment had come. The York and

Lancasters fixed bayonets and asked Hart for permission to begin. Had the decision rested with that gallant, if hot-headed, officer, he would undoubtedly have placed himself at their head and led them straight at the trenches. But at this moment (3.30 P.M.) Clery intervened and stopped the advance. Seized with misgivings he had communicated these misgivings to Warren, who had signalled back his concurrence in the abandonment of the frontal attack, and had suggested that the troops should hold the ground gained, and continue the advance by night or next day. A night attack, now that the position was clearly understood, was perfectly practicable both in front of the ground gained by Hart, up the long ravine, or simply up the Fairview road. As it happened, owing to the lack of room in the firing-line on the right, some five and a half companies of the Borders under Captain Bellamy, and about 100 men of the Lancashire Fusiliers, had gone over the slope into the ravine, and, finding cover, had pushed right up to the head of the gully close under the Boer position. Later in the afternoon Bellamy sent back asking for permission to attack at night, but was ordered to rejoin the rest of the force after dark. But the generals were already daunted, and there was no real intention of renewing the attack. Along the rest of Hart's front the men were gradually withdrawn under the southern crest, and at night-fall the outpost line was taken over by the West Yorks, whom Hildyard had sent up in support. The total casualties in this purposeless preparatory advance were 28 killed and 280 wounded.

Dundonald seizes Bastion Hill.

Meanwhile an independent series of operations had been going on to the left. That morning Dundonald was to draw in his force from the positions he had held since the 18th. But knowing that an attack was in contemplation he sent the Composite Regiment up the Acton Homes road to demonstrate against the Boer right, before bringing in the rest to their new positions on Warren's immediate flank. Right in front of him as he marched in towered the great bastion, jutting out from the south-western corner of Tabanyama, nearly 800 feet above the plain. From where he was Dundonald could see Hart's advance, and could see, too,

what an effective support a flank fire from Bastion Hill would mean. He decided to take it, and told off the South African Light Horse for the purpose. Colonel Byng detached two squadrons under Major Childe to make the attack, and sent the other, together with a squadron of 13th Hussars and the Colt gun battery, to cover the attack from a wood at the foot. The attacking force crossed the open at a hand gallop, extending as they came under a dropping fire, and then dismounted and slowly proceeded to climb the great hill; Dundonald with his signallers in rear of the leading squadron. The steepness of the hill, and the energetic fire of the supports upon the crest-line, protected the advance. Botha, realizing the tactical importance of the hill, personally brought into action a Creuzot from the extreme Boer right near Acton Homes. From there it could get at the supports and the battery, and the latter, by dint of remarkably accurate firing, it eventually forced to retire. But it was too late to save the hill. The Boers on the top, never in any great number, were already retreating as the attackers neared the crest (2.50 P.M.). One man, Corporal Tobin, a sailor, scrambled up far ahead of his comrades, and the whole army saw the tiny figure standing alone on the top of the great hill, waving his hat as a signal that the enemy had fled. Once on the top the small force proceeded to intrench, but before they had done so a shell from the long-range gun killed Major Childe, while a few other men were wounded. Thorneycroft, no longer under Dundonald, now offered to assist, and occupied the crest of the steep-sided valley between Bastion Hill and the next buttress to the right, generally known as Sugarloaf Hill, supported by a company of East Surreys, and eventually by the Queen's, sent up by Hildyard. The whole southern crest-line was now in British possession.

Boers abandon advanced positions after dark.

Neither the continuous shelling from the six batteries nor the advance of Hart's infantry had inflicted much damage, material or moral, upon the Boers. As at Colenso, the British generals, discouraged by the casualties involved in the mere preliminary advance, had given up before any real attack was begun. As far as that side was concerned the Boers felt that they had little to fear, except, indeed, a night attack.

But the occupation of Bastion Hill and the crest eastward of it was a very different matter, bringing, as it did, a flank and rear fire to bear upon their advanced schanzes. They decided to abandon the advanced position, and during the night fell back upon their main and last line of defence. Of that line the higher eastern portion had already been put to the test of the British artillery fire and had proved its security. The western, covered by the slight rise along which the advanced position had been thrown forward, was completely invisible to the guns on Three Tree Hill. The glacis in front of it, though flatter and only about 1,200 yards wide, was quite sufficient to check a frontal attack. The only serious weakness was its right flank. To protect this Botha brought round another gun next morning, while patrols were boldly pushed forward past Acton Homes in order to keep the mounted troops on the defensive and prevent any reconnaissance which might expose the Boer weakness. Urgent requests for reinforcements were sent to Ladysmith, and several parties, possibly 500 in all, arrived in the course of the 21st. These measures were quite insufficient against a real attack, and ultimately Botha's defence relied on nothing better than the incapacity of his opponents to grasp the tactical situation—a reliance which, however, the event was to justify.

Jan. 21. W. Kitchener's attack stopped by Clery.

On the British side a redistribution of commands now took place. Three battalions of Hildyard's held Bastion Hill and the valley to the east, replacing the mounted troops. Colonel Kitchener of the West Yorks commanded. Hildyard himself with the Devons guarded the bivouac, and was also given command over the mounted troops, in order the more effectively to tie them to the work of camp guards. From Sugarloaf Hill eastwards the crest was under Hart. Warren's headquarters were moved up to Three Tree Hill, close to Clery's. An inspection of the ground in front of him convinced Kitchener that the Boer right was located on the hill immediately north of him, and that its capture presented no serious difficulty. He consulted Hart, who approved, and was prepared to support with a direct frontal attack. In the absence of artillery on this flank,

Kitchener proposed to preface his attack by continuous Maxim and rifle-fire on the Boer schanzes, and for this purpose Hart sent him the Dublin Fusiliers to the crest-line west of Sugarloaf. A covered donga ran some way into the plateau from the western crest, offering a fire position within 600 yards of the enemy's advanced schanzes. This was to be occupied by the Queen's, under cover of whose fire Colonel Harris, with half the East Surreys, was to work round the western slope close under the crest of the enemy's hill. The general assault would then follow. About 11 A.M., after some hours' heavy firing, the advance began. The Queen's occupied the donga, and the leading company of the East Surreys pushed up the narrow re-entrant between the two hills close under the Boer position. A premature attempt of two companies of the Queen's to advance from the donga was checked at once, four officers out of five being wounded before the line had got fifty yards across the open. But two batteries were at last coming round, and Kitchener was confident of success. At that moment an order came from Clery ordering the attack to be stopped at once. As it happened, the attack would probably have succeeded, though few on the British side thought so at the time. The Boer position had not been properly intrenched, and the low stone walls which had been put up proved so inadequate, even against Maxim and rifle-fire, that many of the defenders were, apparently, seized by a panic and abandoned them. In any case there can be no doubt that with more men and with artillery preparation the position could at any time have been taken without difficulty, and the whole of the Tabanyama trenches turned.

Buller makes suggestions; Warren decides on a policy of bombardment.

Before this Buller had come round from Spearman's, and in his capacity of critic commented freely to Warren upon the faultiness of Clery's dispositions, more especially upon the crowding of all the batteries on the inner flank. He suggested that some should be sent to operate against the Boer right, which, according to Ladysmith messages, was being reinforced by 2,500 men.* As a matter of fact, Warren, at the instance of Hildyard, who was anxious about his flank, had already ordered round the 19th and 28th

* See p. 235.

Batteries, which came into action at midday on the left bank of the Venter's Spruit against the Boer patrols who were engaging Dundonald, and against the western slopes of Tabanyama. But no attempt was made to haul guns on to the crest or to push them round sufficiently on the flanks to bring a really effective fire to bear. Escaping from Buller, whose presence he seems to have found more trying than directly helpful, Warren proceeded to inspect the left flank beyond Bastion Hill with a view to carrying out the attack which Kitchener had just been forced to relinquish. But the thought of the two Boer guns beyond Acton Homes was again too much for him. He decided that the only thing was to take the Boer trenches opposite Three Tree Hill by a direct assault at daybreak, pushing the troops up under the cover of the long ravine. But before venturing the assault he resolved to wait and see if he could not first demoralize the Boers by pounding them incessantly for three or four days with a concentrated artillery fire. Warren probably overestimated the demoralizing effect of such a bombardment. Unless compelled to man the trenches by an imminent infantry attack the Boers would, and indeed did, largely keep below the rear crest-line. Still some effect it would and did have, and, as the attack was one which was perfectly feasible anyhow, the bombardment might no doubt to some extent have improved its chances of success. Having settled upon his plan, Warren telegraphed to Buller for the 10th Brigade and more especially for howitzers and long-range guns. The infantry and four howitzers were sent that night. To the request for naval guns Buller paid no attention.*

* Both the naval guns and the balloon would have been most useful to Warren. The one would have shown him the enemy's positions, the other would have dissipated the fear of the enemy's long-range guns which throughout dominated him. Inspired by knowledge and confidence, his whole conduct of the operations might, perhaps, have been different. Had he been in supreme command of the whole force Warren would no doubt have ordered them round from the first, at any rate before the 20th. In the anomalous position in which he was, he was naturally reluctant to worry for more than had already been assigned him. Here, as in every other feature of the operations, the cause of failure was the fact that Buller had completely abdicated the command himself without giving it fully to any one else.

The troops perched under the crest of Tabanyama.

No further movement was made this day, but a continuous musketry and artillery fire was maintained by both sides. Perched up under the crest the British troops were secure from direct fire. But with two guns on their extreme right above Acton Homes, and three guns and two pom-poms on the left, close to the road, the Boers were able to search the sides of the re-entrants with an oblique cross-fire which, though comparatively harmless, proved rather trying to the troops in the course of the next few days. At evening most of the troops on the crest were relieved. The East Surreys remained on Bastion Hill, to their right the Lancashire Fusiliers, with the Devons beyond. The total casualties for the day were 169, of which nearly two-thirds had taken place in Kitchener's attack.

Jan. 22. Buller insists on some action. The Spion Kop compromise.

Next morning Buller rode over, and for the first time made it clear to Warren that he was dissatisfied with the progress Warren thought himself to be making. To the plan of demoralizing the enemy by days of artillery preparation Buller refused to listen for a moment. Coming as it did on top of the two days spent in passing wagons over the river, and of the aimless meanderings of the 19th, he treated it, not without reason, as a mere excuse of Warren's for wasting time in order to postpone the agony of a decision. He told Warren that, unless he could make up his mind to attack at once, the force would be withdrawn across the Tugela. He himself was for attacking the enemy's right, which, as he correctly observed, was in the air. Against this all Warren's fears of being drawn away from his base, and left at the mercy of long-range guns, rose up in protest. As Buller would have none of his own plan, the only alternative he could suggest was the seizure of Spion Kop. Buller agreed at once, but Warren, always cautious, said he would consult his generals before settling it. Should they concur he intended to lead the attack in person. This Buller refused to allow. Warren at once summoned all available generals to a discussion, including the newly-arrived Talbot Coke, while Buller rode away to have a look at the left flank. At the conference Clery expressed himself in the strongest fashion against the attack on the Boer right, which he

LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR CHAS. WARREN,
G C.M.G , K.C.B.
COMMANDING 5TH INFANTRY DIVISION IN NATAL.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

MAJOR-GENERAL (LOCAL LIEUTENANT-GENERAL)
SIR C. F. CLERY, K.C.B.
COMMANDING 2ND INFANTRY DIVISION.
Photo by Bassano.

[Face p. 238.

considered would commit the force to the attack of all the Boer positions on the crest in succession—a curious way of describing what would have been the rolling up of the enemy's line. The others agreed, or had nothing to say, and so it was that the attack upon Spion Kop was decided on. Buller, meanwhile, as the result of his inspection on the left flank, had become more strongly convinced than ever that this was the side to attack from. He worked out a plan for an attack, and sent it to Warren in a letter. But it was a mere suggestion, which Buller did not even try to enforce by seeing Warren again on his way back. Warren, with the opinion of his council to fortify him, disregarded it. Buller's whole conduct, indeed, was getting more and more extraordinary. He was determined not to let Warren work out his own plan in his own way; he could not bring himself to insist that Warren should carry out the plan he himself was convinced was the right one; he would not take over the command himself, though the arrival of the 10th Brigade now furnished him with a perfectly natural pretext for restoring Warren to his proper position as a divisional commander. But by the absurd threat of withdrawing the force, and thus abandoning all the progress made, he induced Warren to undertake an operation which neither he nor Warren really believed in. The occupation of Spion Kop was not the outcome of a reasoned military plan at all, but a compromise—proposed by Warren in the hope of gaining a few days' more respite for the execution of his own plan, to which he was still at heart firmly wedded; and accepted by Buller as freeing him from the responsibility of taking matters into his own hands.

Attack on Spion Kop deferred.

Warren now redistributed his whole force into right and left attacks. The former included all troops on Three Tree Hill and eastwards, and was placed under Coke, who was now appointed to the command of the Fifth Division, Colonel Hill of the Middlesex succeeding to the command of the 10th Brigade. The latter consisted of all troops west of Three Tree Hill, and was under Clery. The capture of Spion Kop was assigned to the right attack, the idea being to take the hill at night, and intrench it before daybreak in case of

a counter-attack. Coke selected Hill to lead the attack with the Middlesex, Dorsets, and Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry. But it was already 5 P.M. before Coke had got his orders from Warren. The hill had not been reconnoitred. The battalions selected were still at Venter's Spruit. Innumerable other preparations for the night march had still to be made. Coke represented all this to Warren, and the attack was deferred to the following night. Meanwhile, Warren's plan of demoralizing the enemy had been steadily kept up all day, the howitzers, two on Three Tree Hill, and two on the left, being especially busy. The troops clung on under the crest, sweltering, uncomfortable, harassed by intermittent shell-fire, and above all puzzled to discover the object of their operations hitherto, or any indication of a definite plan for the future. There is nothing the soldier perceives so quickly as that he is being wasted. Warren's army knew it, and the knowledge did not increase their fighting value.

Jan. 23. Preparations for the attack.

Daylight on the 23rd was ushered in to the monotonous accompaniment of slow firing. At 5 A.M. Warren, Coke, Thorneycroft and other officers, rode out to reconnoitre the approach to the summit of Spion Kop, and to discuss the best means of defending the hill when occupied. Buller arrived soon after Warren's return to camp. He was annoyed at the postponement, and peremptorily insisted that the attack must be made that night or he should retire the force. Nor was he satisfied with the arrangements made. Misapprehending Warren's explanation of the division of the fighting line, and assuming that the actual attack was to be made by Coke, who was still somewhat lame from a broken leg, and whom he anyhow seems to have thought too slow and cautious, he told Warren that he had better send Woodgate instead. He then returned to Spearman's, leaving Lieut.-Colonel àCourt of his staff to assist Woodgate, but otherwise washing his hands of the whole operation. Woodgate selected from his own brigade the Lancashire Fusiliers, six companies of the Royal Lancasters, and two companies of South Lancashires. To these were added 200 of Thorneycroft's, and half the 17th Company R.E., making the total force over 1,700 men. The rest of the day was spent by

Warren and Coke in completing the most essential preparations for the attack. The Somerset Light Infantry replaced the Royal Lancasters on Three Tree Hill. The Middlesex, Dorsets, and Imperial Light Infantry (an Uitlander corps which had been brought up from Estcourt, and was now incorporated in the 10th Brigade) were to be held in readiness to support the attack. Two companies of the Connaughts were ordered to follow the attacking party, and intrench the lower slopes of Spion Kop to cover a possible withdrawal. A battery was ordered to come round from the left in the morning to the extreme right flank, held by the Royal Dragoons. Points were selected on to which the artillery on Three Tree Hill were to fire in the dark, as soon as the summit was taken, in order to check a possible counter-attack. An artillery officer with a staff of signallers was instructed to accompany the column to signal the effect of the artillery fire, and to report on the feasibility of getting up field-guns or naval 12-pounders. A telegram had been sent in the morning for a mountain battery which Warren supposed to be at Potgieter's, but which, as a matter of fact, only left Frere that evening. The remaining half of the 17th Company R.E. was ordered to make a road up the hill and prepare gun-slides. Arrangements were made for a dressing-station on the summit, for stretcher-bearers, for a hospital at the foot of the hill, for a sufficient water supply, for the supply of food in addition to the one day's rations the men were to carry with them. Warren personally directed these arrangements, and, at any rate, as regards matters of detail, his preparations were all that could reasonably be expected.

Lyttelton's demonstrations. Jan. 18–23.

During these five days Lyttelton had been occupied in fulfilling as best he could his part of a containing force. His demonstration of the 17th has already been referred to. It was repeated on the 18th, the troops across the river being strongly reinforced just before dark in order to keep the Boers in their trenches in anticipation of a night attack. On the 19th a steady fire was kept up against the trenches. As Lyttelton, like Warren, was left practically to his own devices, he began corresponding with Warren direct, inquiring daily in what way he could best co-operate. Warren

was naturally busy with his own dispositions, knew nothing of the situation on the right flank, and was hardly in the position to order a combined attack. He replied with vaguely evasive messages of thanks, at the most suggesting a demonstration. On this flank, as on the other, in spite of Lyttelton's eagerness to be up and doing, Buller's abdication of authority exerted its paralysing influence. On the evening of the 19th Lyttelton offered to co-operate by a night attack, having previously demonstratively withdrawn some of his men across the river. Warren replied next morning that he was too far for Lyttelton to give any help except by demonstrating, which the latter accordingly did, pushing the 60th forward some distance, where they had a score or so of casualties. Schiet Drift was watched during these days by a battalion of Coke's brigade and some of Bethune's Mounted Infantry. The battalion was now removed to join Warren with the rest of the brigade. To replace Coke's battalions at Spearman's, where a large guard was supposed by Buller to be necessary, the Scots Fusiliers were brought up from Chieveley, while Lyttelton was ordered to send back the 60th from the Maconochie Kopjes. The bombardment was kept up steadily from the 21st to the 23rd. On the 22nd one of the pontoon sections was brought down from Trichardt's and a bridge constructed at Potgieter's, an indication to the troops that the forward move might soon be expected. On the 23rd the movement of considerable parties of Boers eastwards along Lyttelton's front, reported by the balloon and by Bethune's scouts, created some anxiety for the safety of the flank at Schiet Drift. The real reason, a demonstration by Barton against Colenso, had apparently not been communicated to Lyttelton.

Barton at Chieveley. Jan. 10–24.

As soon as the main force had started on its march to the Upper Tugela Barton had rearranged all his corps at Chieveley, drawing them up on a broad front in prominent positions in order to give the impression that he had been reinforced. A desultory shell-fire was kept up on the Boer trenches, and on the 15th a demonstration to within extreme rifle-range was carried out in conjunction with some of the troops from Frere. On the 19th there was a skirmish at

Robinson's Drift in which six of the South African Light Horse were taken prisoners. Though not very energetic these demonstrations were successful in preventing the Boers from reducing their force at Colenso to below 3,500 men. On the 23rd Barton ordered up the artillery, mounted troops, and 400 rifles from Frere, and, thus reinforced, carried out a vigorous reconnaissance in force against the Boer positions from Hlangwane to Cingolo, and, at the cost of a dozen killed and wounded, and another dozen of Bethune's Mounted Infantry surrounded and captured, ascertained that the positions were still held by at least 400 Boers. The reconnaissance proved more effective than Barton realized at the time, or he might well have ventured to press it harder. The news that the Hlangwane positions were suddenly attacked by a large force caused no little alarm in the laagers on the Upper Tugela, and many of the burghers hurried back, believing that the real attack was, after all, to come in that quarter. Apart from the mere transference of a few hundred burghers, Barton's demonstration, coming as it did at a critical moment in the course of the operations, had a considerable moral value, which would have been still further enhanced if Buller had thought of ordering its repetition on the 24th.

Boer depression.

For without a doubt the strain of the operations was telling far more heavily on the Boers than on the British. Most of the detachments had come up in a hurry and had been thrown into the firing-line wherever the immediate situation seemed to demand it, with the result that the commandos were quite as much split up as the British units opposite to them, and that the supply arrangements proved entirely inadequate. The burghers on Tabanyama, in fact, for the most part were altogether without supplies, except freshly-killed meat, for the whole five days of the fighting. The constant artillery fire, though comparatively harmless, was beginning to get seriously on their nerves. Their casualties already exceeded 100, in their eyes a considerable figure. Above all, the British movements, ponderously slow though they were, were yet sufficient to produce a sense of confusion and bewilderment in an undisciplined force, unused, as yet, to anything more than a single day's battle of the most elementary

kind. Neither Botha's indefatigable efforts nor even the exhortations of President Steyn, who, ever to the fore in a crisis, had arrived on a visit to the Free State laagers, availed to relieve the atmosphere of depression in the burgher ranks. It only wanted an attack, opened suddenly in an unexpected quarter, pushed home boldly, and supported by a general advance, to precipitate a panic.

CHAPTER X

SPION KOP

SIXTY years before the din of artillery broke upon the peaceful silence of these regions, some venturous scout riding forward from the *voortrekkers'* laagers, as they slowly lumbered southwards from the foot of the Drakensberg passes, climbed up a lofty hill and for the first time gazed upon the Tugela winding at his feet, and upon the endless, billowy confusion of green hills beyond—the promised land of Natal. Spion Kop, the "scout's hill," was well chosen for its purpose. From its summit the eye ranges over a view that even in South Africa there are few to equal. North-east the level plain stretches towards the Ladysmith hills—Cæsar's Camp, Bulwana, Intintanyone. Behind them stand the loftier summits of the Biggarsberg, and beyond these again, pearly grey, but not a whit less sharply defined for the 70 miles between, rise Impati and Indumeni, the mountains between whose feet lie Dundee and the little hill of Talana. Eastwards the eye looks past the Twin Peaks at the end of the Spion Kop ridge, over the low curve of Brakfontein and Vaal Krantz and across to Doorn Kop and Onderbroek, a mass of hills flanked to left and right by the distant pylons of Job's Kop and Umkolumba. Below, at the mountain's southern foot, lies the smiling valley across which the Tugela winds its lazy folds, a silver serpent on a shield of green. In front are Spearman's and Swaartz Kop, beyond which the Springfield flats stretch away towards the hills above Estcourt and Ulundi. Further round is Trichardt's Drift, and then the ground rises to the broad, sloping wold —which is all that can be seen of Tabanyama from above—at

The view from Spion Kop.

whose far end a cluster of green trees marks the settlement of Acton Homes. Beyond, enclosing the whole western horizon, towers the mighty rampart of the Drakensberg; its southern half a sheer unbroken wall from Giant's Castle to the wonderful Mont aux Sources, from whose summit the infant Tugela leaps almost a mile in one dizzy fall of spray; its lower northern half a chain of fantastic castles and mamelons stretching away north-east to that other hill of remorseful memories, distant Majuba.

General shape of the mountain.

The main mass of Spion Kop lies roughly east and west for about two miles, and falls into three distinct portions. At the eastern end stands a pair of sharply defined, almost conical peaks, rising to a height of over 1,200 feet above the Tugela; at the western is the great hump of the main summit, some 200 feet higher. Between the two is a narrow connecting ridge from 1,000 to 1,100 feet high. Beyond the eastern of the Twin Peaks the ridge turns north-eastwards and sinks into the plain in a series of diminishing kopjes. From the main summit a long broad spur or *arête* leads south-westwards, descending by alternate gently sloping plateaux and steep steps, and dividing about half-way down into two branches with a shallow re-entrant between. North-westwards a curious horizontal ridge some 150 feet below the summit runs out for nearly 1,000 yards, and then rises 50 feet to a little conical kopje before dropping down on the one side to the nek connecting it with the Green Hill at the eastern end of Tabanyama, and on the other to the plain. This spur, and a northward curve in the main ridge, combine to give the northern face of the main summit a concave appearance, like that of the well of some vast ancient theatre. Everywhere, except along the south-western and north-eastern spurs, the mountain descends steeply, more especially on the southern side, where in places the slope breaks away into short, precipitous cliffs.

The main summit.

The main summit itself is an irregularly shaped hump, roughly 700 yards wide from east to west, with an average depth of about 350 yards. Roughly in the centre of it is a small rock-strewn plateau, about 200 yards each way, which marks the highest point. The western end of the

summit is formed by a second level plateau, nearly twenty feet lower and extending on the west to the edge of the mountain. Northwards and southwards there is a gradual slope from these plateaux to the actual edge of the steep hill-side. At the south-western angle this slope merges into the long spur leading down towards Trichardt's. The eastern portion of the summit is a broad slope narrowing gradually to about 100 yards in a level saddle beyond which a rocky knoll, overgrown with great tufts of spiky aloes, juts north-eastwards before falling sharply towards the main ridge. The Aloe Knoll and the saddle are 70 and 100 feet respectively below the highest point, and in many accounts of the fighting the term summit has been confined to the higher central and western portion only, for reasons which will appear in the narrative. The general shape of the mountain was easily ascertainable by the British. The southern face looked towards Spearman's, the western towards Three Tree Hill, and the balloon, rising to a height of 2,000 feet, commanded a view of the summit and northern slopes quite sufficient for the construction of a sketch serviceable for tactical purposes. But no such sketch was ever made, and neither Sir C. Warren nor any of the officers who took part in the operation had more than the vaguest idea of the shape of the mountain they were to occupy.

Strength of the Boers on the hill.

When Buller arrived at Potgieter's the north-eastern spur of Spion Kop formed the extreme right of the Boer main position. Subsequently, as the result of Warren's dawdling at Trichardt's, a second Boer position was created on Tabanyama, and Spion Kop became the centre of the Boer line. But no attempt was made to intrench it or man it in strength. The steepness of the hill and the disinclination of the British to move any distance away from the road probably seemed adequate protection, and meanwhile the burghers were more urgently required at the points immediately threatened. A patrol of some 70 Vryheid burghers on the main summit was considered sufficient to scare away any British reconnaissance, and to check an attack till reinforcements should arrive. On the night of January 23, however, preparations were being made for assigning a more active part to the

mountain. A Krupp gun was brought round from the south of Ladysmith to the foot of Spion Kop, and a small party of the German commando began work on a gun emplacement on the summit. The British attack deprived the Boer gunners of a capital day's sport they had promised themselves in the way of enfilading the British sangars on Three Tree Hill and stirring up the bivouacs in rear.

Possibilities of Spion Kop: absence of any real plan.

Weakly held as it was, Spion Kop undoubtedly offered a great opportunity for breaking the Boer line in two, and for rolling up either one or both of its wings. The north-western spur completely commanded at rifle-range the Green Hill forming the eastern extremity of the Tabanyama position. Under a cross-fire from Spion Kop and from guns on Three Tree Hill, Green Hill must have fallen almost at once to an attack pressed up the valleys which run up to left and right of it. Its capture would have laid the rest of the Tabanyama trenches open to enfilading fire, under cover of which a direct assault might have been delivered up the long ravine west of Three Tree Hill. Similarly an advance eastward along the ridge would have supported Lyttelton's men in an attempt to seize the Twin Peaks and the north-eastern spur, and thus to turn the Boer position on Brakfontein. A possible, though inferior, plan was to seize and intrench the summit of Spion Kop, in order to invite a counter-attack, which would weaken the Boer line elsewhere and afford a better chance for a decisive attack, frontal or flank, on some other point. No such plans, however, entered into either Buller's or Warren's calculations. Thorneycroft, indeed, had suggested to Warren on the morning of the 23rd the capture of Green Hill, to follow up the capture of Spion Kop, but Warren dismissed the idea as too risky. The truth is there never was a plan at all, for reasons given before. Buller, whose mind was already hankering after a move round the Boer left at Vaal Krantz, took no interest in Spion Kop. Warren was ready to take Spion Kop sooner than have his force withdrawn, and his operations thus declared a failure. Neither wished to do anything with Spion Kop when it was captured. But there was a vague hope that its capture might induce the Boers to abandon their position, at any rate, after an attempt to recapture it.

Failing that, it was thought that guns might be taken on to the summit and the Tabanyama trenches enfiladed.

Warren wishes only to hold the rear crest.

Spion Kop was undoubtedly the key to the Boer positions. But to use a key in order to open the door just wide enough to get one hand in, and then to leave it there, is deliberately to invite having one's fingers crushed. Yet this is precisely what Buller and Warren contemplated doing. They proposed sending a small force to a point in the middle of the enemy's line, and leaving it there to hold its own, and they trusted that three or four hours of trench-work on a rocky hill-top would make up for all the tactical disadvantages of the position. They must have known that the force would be exposed to a cross-fire, and that it could not reckon upon effective artillery support. The British guns below could only maintain an unaimed, indirect fire upon an enemy climbing up the north side, and could do practically nothing to prevent Boer guns from shelling the troops on the summit, more especially if they attempted to hold the forward crest. That much Warren realized, and his view, which he endeavoured, apparently without much effect, to impress upon Woodgate, was that the British should only intrench and occupy the rear crest of the summit, as they were already doing all along Tabanyama. They would thus be out of range of the enemy's artillery, and the Boer riflemen would expose themselves to British shrapnel if they pushed over the hog-backed summit in an attempt to eject them. On the other hand, they would have been unable to do anything at all to keep off the Boers till they came within a few yards of them, and if the Boers had chosen to intrench the other edge of the summit, there could have been no question of guns being taken up, or, in fact, of the occupation of Spion Kop leading to any decisive result whatever. Warren's conception of the defence of Spion Kop, indeed—quite apart from its feasibility, which is doubtful, in view of the peculiar conformation of the summit—only serves to bring out how much the retention of a British force on the mere edge of the summit was to him an end in itself, enabling him to stay on at Three Tree Hill and perhaps, after all, to carry out his own favourite plan of demoralizing the enemy by continued shelling.

Ascent and capture of the hill. 3 A.M., Jan. 24.

At 8.30 P.M. on the 23rd Woodgate's force moved down the gully in rear of Three Tree Hill, where its various units had assembled at dusk, and crossed the valley to the foot of the western branch of the long *arête* of Spion Kop. About 11 P.M. the climb began. Thorneycroft guided the column, followed by his own corps. Behind these, in order, came Woodgate and his staff, the Lancashire Fusiliers, the Engineers, and the Royal Lancasters and South Lancashires. The Engineers each carried pick and shovel, while a few also had crowbars. Five mules loaded with tools also accompanied them, and tools were likewise carried in the stretchers belonging to the infantry. Sandbags were to have been drawn at the rendezvous, but were forgotten. The two companies of Connaughts, who were to cover the attack, followed the tail of the column as it passed their bivouac. "Waterloo" was the countersign. The night was intensely dark, with a slight drizzle, and the advance was slow and wearisome. Frequent halts were made while Thorneycroft with a few men went ahead to puzzle out the way. The Engineers, exhausted by the weight of their tools, were allowed to leave one each behind. Slowly the hours wore on. At last Thorneycroft reached the last of his landmarks, a prominent clump of thorn trees, and knew he was near the top, though nothing could be seen, for the column now plunged into a thick mist which shrouded the whole summit. The slope grew gentler, and as the top of the spur widened towards the summit, Thorneycroft quietly passed the word to front form and fix bayonets. Slowly and silently the long lines crept forward. Suddenly the challenge rang out. Obedient to orders, every man threw himself flat on his face, while the Boer picket blindly emptied their magazines into the darkness. Then Thorneycroft sprang to his feet and gave the order to charge. With a yell the T.M.I. and Fusiliers leapt forward. One Boer died by the bayonet, the rest vanished into the mist. Woodgate formed up the force, and as the mist prevented signalling, ordered the men to give three cheers to let the army know that the hill was taken (3.30 A.M.). Warren and his staff, waiting anxiously below, heard them, and the gunners, as arranged, began to

shell the nek between Spion Kop and Green Hill, and the reverse slopes of Spion Kop, to prevent the Boers from sending reinforcements against the summit.

Difficulty of discovering shape of summit in fog: no attempt made.

The capture of the hill had proved unexpectedly easy. The question now was what to do next. Woodgate's only orders were to intrench the summit. But what was the summit? How far and in what direction did it extend? Dawn was slowly coming on, but the blanket of grey fog remained as impenetrable as ever. This was the moment when a sketch of the summit, however imperfect, might have been of use. But none was provided. The contingency of mist on the hilltops—a frequent phenomenon on all mountains, and one that had marked the morning of Warren's arrival at Trichardt's—had not been foreseen. Yet everything depended on finding out how the ground lay. However difficult a problem that might prove in the fog, no effort should have been spared to solve it. Officers should have been sent out in every direction to explore the shape of the summit and of the further slopes. Before this was done all intrenching was a mere waste of time, for trenches in the wrong place or facing the wrong way are worse than no trenches at all. But the importance of finding out before acting was not a thing on which the training of the British army had ever laid any stress. A hasty examination of the position was made from the little central plateau which the force had reached, so superficial and restricted that neither the real crest-line of the summit, some 100 yards or so in front, nor the eastern portion of the summit, including the Aloe Knoll, were ever discovered. The slight slope of the ground round the central and western plateaux was, without further investigation, assumed to continue indefinitely, and Woodgate ordered the Engineers to lay out a system of intrenchments.

Disposition of the trenches.

The trenches were at once marked out and all available men set to work. The main trench, nearly 200 yards long, ran along the forward edge of the central plateau facing north. Its left rested on a clump of rock from which another trench ran back for nearly 100 yards on the lower western plateau, facing north-west, which, together with a few smaller sangars, formed the defence of the left flank.

The extreme right of the main trench was slightly drawn back, but instead of another long trench covering the right flank, there were only short curved sangars, echeloned behind each other, their right resting upon some rocks at the south-eastern corner of the little plateau. About 50 yards in rear of the main trench was an outcrop of large rocks which marked the highest point of the hill, and offered fair cover, while various small sangars were dotted about in the space enclosed by the trenches. As a matter of fact, these trenches only commanded a field of fire varying from 150 yards on the left and right rear to about 80 yards on the right of the main trench. The right-hand half of the main trench and all the smaller works on the right flank were open to enfilade fire at 250 yards from the Aloe Knoll. But no one seems to have realized this or even imagined its possibility, and Woodgate and the officers with whom he conferred seem to have rested content with the hope that the trenches commanded an open field of fire, and that the flanks would be all right. The mist, terribly baffling though it was, can hardly be held sufficient reason for this readiness to take things for granted. Even if it was thought necessary to begin intrenching at once, scouts could have been sent forward while the work was in progress. But nothing of the sort was done, and for three hours the force worked away without an attempt to find out what lay 100 yards in front of it, still less to discover the movements of the enemy, who might at any moment begin the attack.

Defective execution of the trenches.

The execution of the intrenchments was hardly less defective than their disposition. Picks and crowbars were scarce, and the little regulation intrenching tools of the infantry were ill-suited for mountain work. The loose soil was of the shallowest, and the men were forced, as soon as they struck the solid rock, to widen the trenches. Sandbags would have been invaluable, but they had been forgotten. In the end the trenches mostly consisted of a low wall of stones and rubbish, rising a foot or eighteen inches from a wide and shallow ditch scraped out behind. Officers tried to urge the men to improve them and to construct loopholes and traverses against cross-fire. But the men, naturally

averse to intrenching, were further tired out by the stiff climb and the sleepless night following after several days of fighting, and would not, or could not, work harder. The fact is that neither in bodily endurance nor in mental foresight was the average British soldier up to the high standard required by modern war. The right of the main trench, and the smaller trenches on the right flank, were assigned to the Lancashire Fusiliers. The left flank was allotted to the Royal Lancasters and South Lancashires, while the T.M.I. were in the centre, holding the left half of the main trench and a smaller portion of the left-hand trench.

Confusion in the Boer laagers; resolve to retake the hill.

The Boer picket dropped rapidly down the hill and carried the tidings of the capture of Spion Kop to Schalk Burger's headquarters. The alarm was at once spread by messengers to the laagers east and west. The news created a general consternation. Worn out as they were by the continuous fighting and shelling of the last few days, many of the burghers only thought of flight. The wagon laagers on the plain behind Spion Kop and Tabanyama packed up and started trekking off towards Ladysmith or the Drakensberg, anxious to be out of the reach of shell-fire from Spion Kop, and to have a good start if a general flight should follow. But while the weaker spirits prepared for flight, others were planning bolder measures. Schalk Burger asked for volunteers to recapture the hill, and Commandant Prinsloo, of Carolina, at once started off with a handful of his men, followed by small parties from the Heidelberg, Vryheid, and other commandos. On the other side Botha collected men at the foot of the north-western spur of Spion Kop, and sent them forward to get in touch with the British, while he himself hurried round to Acton Homes and transferred two guns from that wing to points immediately in rear of the trenches on Tabanyama, from which the summit of Spion Kop might be enfiladed.* The Krupp lying at the foot of Spion Kop was hastily withdrawn to a rise 3,000 yards north-west of the summit. About 6 A.M. some 250 burghers began the attack, or rather climbed unopposed—except for unaimed shell-fire—

* And it was largely to avoid facing these two guns that Warren had chosen to attack Spion Kop instead of going round Tabanyama!

up to convenient positions from which to begin attacking later. The Carolina burghers found the eastern end of the summit unoccupied, and at once proceeded to ensconce themselves among the rocks on the Aloe Knoll. Others worked up towards the northern crest of the summit or occupied the north-western spur. Besides the attacking party, hundreds more were collecting in the dongas at the foot of the hill, along the northern slopes of the main ridge, and in the Utrecht trenches on Green Hill, in order to support the attack as soon as the fighting should begin. Meanwhile, Burger, whose headquarters were telegraphically connected with Ladysmith, sent an anxious message to Joubert for instructions. Joubert immediately replied that the hill must be retaken at all hazards and suggested using the long-range Creuzot to bombard it. At the same time he ordered reinforcements from the laagers round Ladysmith, and several small parties left before 8 A.M. Kruger, too, on receipt of the news, at once telegraphed to ask what steps had been taken for the recapture of the hill. On the Boer side, at least, there was no lack of promptitude or decision.

7 A.M. British discover crest but not Aloe Knoll.

It was not till after 7 A.M. that the British discovered their mistake with regard to the crest, and that a half-hearted attempt was made to remedy it. The sappers were sent forward to the crest to make new trenches, and outposts were pushed beyond them. But the Boers creeping up in the mist began firing, whereupon the outposts fell back and the working parties were withdrawn. The regiments were left to make their own arrangements for holding the crest-line, and detachments were pushed forward to hold any rocks that offered cover or to intrench themselves as best they could. At 7.30 the mist cleared slightly in places, and for the first time some of the defenders of the hill got an inkling of what lay before them. Even now, however, no one seems to have realized the importance, perhaps even the existence, of the Aloe Knoll, which, in Boer hands, completely enfiladed the British trenches; whereas, in British occupation, it would have subjected the northern face of the mountain to a searching cross-fire, and at once have driven away the Boers now clustering thickly on the slopes. At any rate, no attempt

was made to occupy it, or to rectify the faulty disposition of the trenches on the right flank. A spluttering fire opened, but after a few minutes the mist fell again. Woodgate now (7.45 A.M.) considered the situation sufficiently secure to send down àCourt to report to Warren and Buller on the state of affairs, requesting him at the same time to suggest to Lyttelton to co-operate on the right. He also sent down nearly all the Engineers to help Colonel Sim in the task of laying out a road up the mountain, and making gun-slides for the mountain battery and naval guns which it was hoped would soon be brought up.*

8–8.30 A.M. Mist finally clears. Boers open rifle and artillery-fire.

Not long after àCourt left the mist finally cleared (8–8.30 A.M.), though for half an hour or more a light haze hung about, impeding flag-signalling and preventing those below from realizing what was happening on the summit. In a moment the whole situation was transformed, and the British discovered the terrible death-trap in which they had placed themselves. The Boers, who were perfectly ready and had only been waiting for the mist to rise, at once poured in a terrific fire. The Carolina men on the Aloe Knoll, almost unmolested by any return fire, searched the whole eastern half of the trenches, picking off the unfortunate Lancashire Fusiliers, man after man, as they lay in fancied security or looked over the low parapet to fire at distant reinforcements coming up in front of them.† On the forward crest the advanced sections of the various regiments were exposed to a concentrated frontal and cross-fire from the Boer supports on Green Hill, on the knoll at the end of the north-western spur, in the dongas at the foot of the mountain, and along the slopes of the Aloe Knoll and the main ridge, under cover of which the storming party was steadily creeping closer up the dead ground of the slope. Against this volume of fire they could bring only their own few rifles to bear, for, owing to the shape of the ground, the men in the trenches and the supports behind were unable to

* Colonel Sim, C.R.E. to the Fifth Division, had been sent off by Sir C. Warren to supervise this work at 3 A.M. and after a short time on the summit returned to the lower slopes with Colonel àCourt.

† According to Louis Botha no less than 70 of the dead found in these trenches had bullet wounds through the right side of the head.

give them any assistance. Before long the Boer artillery joined in and swept the crest-line with a deadly fire. Their guns were few—two guns and a pom-pom on the northern edge of Tabanyama, a gun due north, a pom-pom on the slopes of the main ridge, and a gun from Schalk Burger's camp in rear of the Twin Peaks—but admirably posted and directed with amazing accuracy. Botha's first care had been to send up a heliograph and signallers to the Aloe Knoll, and throughout the day they gave invaluable assistance to Major Wolmarans and his gunners.

Helplessness of the British artillery.

The British, with more than ten times as many guns, produced practically no effect. The artillery signallers on the summit had great difficulty in getting their flag signals read below, and such scanty information as they could give with regard to the general direction of the Boer guns only encouraged the British gunners in their indefatigable but futile endeavour to shell the invisible guns across the hills, instead of devoting their whole attention to the Boer riflemen at points where the result of their fire might have been seen, and where they might have co-operated with the infantry. The fault was not that of the gunners, for no information ever reached them as to points where they could help to dislodge the Boers, and it was not for some hours that they realized that the entire summit was not in British possession. They did what they could, in the absence of proper information, and vigorously shelled the knoll at the end of the north-western spur of Spion Kop, and dropped shrapnel over what they conceived to be the approaches to the mountain—they too might have benefited if the available information had been put at their disposal in the shape of a map. But the Boers, lying among the rocks on the steep northern side of the spur, were practically immune from their fire, while, on the plain beyond, the shrapnel, bursting high and falling in a comparatively harmless shower, chiefly served to hurry the pace of the Boer reinforcements.

8.45 A.M. Woodgate mortally wounded.

The situation on the summit was rapidly becoming critical. The Boers were now firing from every possible point from which the summit could be reached, their rifle and artillery fire converging on it over an arc of fully 120 degrees.

Woodgate, followed by his staff, walked along the trenches, exposing himself recklessly as he encouraged the men and ordered forward reinforcements to the crest. Whether even now he fully realized the seriousness of the position is uncertain, but apparently he entrusted the signal station, which was on the western edge of the summit, with an urgent request for reinforcements. The signallers found so hot a fire directed upon them as soon as they began to work their heliograph, that they gave up the attempt and moved across to the south-eastern side of the spur, whence some one eventually transmitted the following desperately anxious message, which seems to have reached the signal station at Mount Alice before 10 A.M. :—*

"Am exposed to terrible cross-fire, especially near first dressing station ; can barely hold our own ; water badly needed ; help us. —Woodgate."

A few minutes later (8.45 A.M.),† while standing near the left of the main trench with Colonel Blomfield, of the Lancashire Fusiliers, who was pointing out to him the Boer reinforcements coming up a path on the slopes below the Aloe Knoll, Woodgate was mortally wounded through the head. He was carried to the trench, and a little later to the first dressing station, which had been established under the ledge in rear of the big rocks at the south-eastern end of the position.‡ Captain Vertue, his brigade-major, who had shown conspicuous

* See 'The Commission of H.M.S. *Terrible*,' p. 151. There is considerable doubt as to the authenticity of this document, and, in any case, the actual wording given can hardly have been Woodgate's, and was probably garbled by some signaller.

† According to the evidence of officers on the summit Woodgate was hit about half an hour after the clearing of the mist, which, however, they place at 8 or even 7.30. But, according to those below, the cloud-cap was still thick at 8.30 and signalling difficult even after 9. The clearing of the mist, Woodgate's wound, and the despatch of Crofton's message followed pretty quickly upon each other, and working back from the official time of the receipt of the message (9.50) as a fixed *datum*, it would seem that the mist cleared about 8.15 and that Woodgate was wounded about 8.45 A.M., perhaps even later.

‡ After 12 o'clock the dressing station was moved, owing to the heavy fire, to a point farther back on the rear slope of the summit, and after 4 P.M. still farther, to below the trees on the south-western spur.

gallantry, was killed immediately after; and with his death, following upon Woodgate's wound and àCourt's departure, the whole sequence of ideas on the summit was lost. But before that both he and Blomfield had made their way across to Colonel Crofton, commanding the Royal Lancasters on the left, and informed him that Woodgate was dead and that he was now the senior officer on the hill.

Crofton's message for reinforcements.

Crofton's first idea was to send an urgent request for reinforcements. He found the signalling officer, Lieutenant Martin, but the heliograph and the signallers had disappeared. Martin, however, succeeded in finding the flag-signaller who had been sending messages to the artillery, and, in Crofton's presence, gave him verbally * a message informing Warren that Woodgate was dead, and asking for reinforcements to be sent at once. The whole incident took place under a fairly heavy fire, and when the two officers left, the signaller, over-excited by the sense of danger, or simply wishing to convey the state of affairs in what he considered appropriate words, despatched the following message:—

"Colonel Crofton to G.O.C. Force. Reinforce at once or all lost. General dead."

Warren's movements. 3–9 A.M.

Warren had quitted his bivouac at 3 A.M., and after sending Sim to Spion Kop, went with his staff to the artillery position on Three Tree Hill, where he remained till dawn (5 A.M.). As no message had reached him from Woodgate, except one sent when half-way up the hill, he now sent up Major Kelly of his staff to report. An hour later he despatched a messenger to Woodgate, asking him to send back all mules that could be spared for sending up water and supplies. At 7 A.M. he rode across to the foot of the hill, where he found water being taken up in tins and the sappers at work on a zig-zag track, and eventually returned to his bivouac towards 9 A.M. and reported progress to Buller. Nearly all this while the mist was still hanging, not over Spion Kop alone, but over the whole of Tabanyama. Had

* Signallers are not supposed to send any messages that are not written and signed, but Lieutenant Martin had no paper and the occasion was urgent.

MAJOR-GENERAL SIR E. R. P. WOODGATE, K.C.M.G., C.B.
COMMANDING 11TH BRIGADE.
MORTALLY WOUNDED AT SPION KOP.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

MAJOR GENERAL J. TALBOT-COKE.
COMMANDING 10TH BRIGADE.
Photo by Dickinson.

[Face p. 258.

there been any plan for following up the capture of Spion Kop by a general advance on the left, fortune could hardly have been more favourable to Warren; for the mist, so terribly perplexing to the captors of Spion Kop, would here have only furnished a kindly shelter across the slope whose minutest features officers had for days been scanning with their glasses. But there was no plan.

9 A.M. àCourt's arrival. Reinforcements sent up. 9.50 A.M. Warren receives Crofton's message.

At this juncture àCourt arrived from the summit and now brought Warren the first authentic news of what had happened above. Though he reported that water was scarce and that it was desirable to send up guns, his account was on the whole very reassuring—as far as it went. But as àCourt had left the summit before the mist rose and the attack began, that was not much to go upon. And in any case, it was now becoming evident that Woodgate's force was being vigorously attacked. Warren accordingly sent a message to Coke, whose bivouac was on the eastern edge of the Three Tree Hill plateau, to reinforce the summit with a battalion (9.10 A.M.). Coke sent the Imperial Light Infantry, who were nearest, ordering them to creep round the steep south-eastern face of the mountain and thus get on to the enemy's left flank. The idea was sound, but does not seem to have been impressed sufficiently clearly on the officer in command, for, having worked round as far as the eastern branch of the *arête*, he allowed himself to be deterred from proceeding by the steepness of the hillside, and, turning northwards, eventually took his men up by the ordinary route, having wasted an hour or more crawling round the lower slopes. A little later Warren rode over to Coke and ordered him to send up another battalion. Coke sent Colonel Hill with the Middlesex, with orders to go straight up by the ordinary route (9.40 A.M.). As Warren rode back to his headquarters (9.50 A.M.) he was met by the signalling officer, who handed to him Crofton's message which had arrived a few minutes before.* Other

* Major Levita, the only staff officer at headquarters when the message arrived, had meanwhile already informed Buller, Clery, and Coke, urging the latter to reinforce, and had started the Somerset L.I. to move across to the positions occupied up to this by the Middlesex.

forms of the same message, one of which may have been a summary of Woodgate's message, reached him, directly or through Spearman's, in the course of the next few minutes.

Warren makes no attempt to take pressure off Spion Kop.

Warren signalled back to Crofton that reinforcements were on their way, and concluded his message with the words: "Hold on to the last. No surrender!" At the same time he communicated Crofton's message to Lyttelton, and requested him to give every assistance he could on the right, where it was evident the enemy was pressing most severely. That he could assist himself with the 10,000 men still at his disposal and in touch with the enemy along four miles of front, was a thing that, even now, he could not, or would not, see. The suggestion that something should be done on the left seems to have been pressed more than once in the course of the morning by junior staff officers, especially after reports had come in that the Boers were transferring men and guns from their right towards Spion Kop. But beyond some vague discussion with Clery and Hildyard, neither of whom seems to have had the least inclination to do anything, nothing came of it. Warren, who had received a message from Buller, telling him to look out for a Boer counter-attack on his left, was content to acquiesce in Clery's resolute inaction. The fact is that Warren, throughout the day, could not bring himself to take a sufficiently serious view of the situation. He attributed the messages from Spion Kop to mere loss of nerve on the part of one man, and considered that in reinforcing the hill he was doing all that could possibly be required of him. Within the limits of his point of view, however, he was fairly active. He ordered several thousand sandbags to be sent across to the foot of the hill to be distributed among the Middlesex and the Dorsets, who were just starting. He sent an officer to Trichardt's Drift to direct the mountain battery which he was still momentarily expecting. Lastly he now (10.50 A.M.) acceded to Coke's request to be allowed to go up the hill on which most of his division now were, his parting words to Coke being "Mind, no surrender." At 11.10 A.M. Coke and the Dorsets began to climb the hill.

Lyttelton had moved out three of his battalions before

dawn, and, under cover of artillery fire from the 64th Battery and naval guns, had begun a vigorous demonstration against Brakfontein. At 8 A.M., however, Buller, fearing that an engagement would be precipitated in front of Brakfontein, had ordered their withdrawal. Lyttelton now sent a message to Warren offering to demonstrate wherever his help would be most useful, and about half an hour later (10 A.M.) received Warren's request for assistance, followed by an anonymous appeal for help from the summit. He at once withdrew the Scottish Rifles from the left bank, and ordered them, together with two squadrons of Bethune's Mounted Infantry, to recross the river by a Kaffir drift immediately opposite the middle of the Spion Kop ridge and to go up the hill to support Crofton's right. The 60th Rifles were also to cross the drift. But instead of going to the left they were ordered to advance straight across the plain and occupy the Twin Peaks. Lyttelton and his staff, indeed, seem to have been the only people in authority who realized the necessity of distributing the attack over a wider front, and appreciated the tactical importance of the eastern half of Spion Kop. Lyttelton might even with advantage have followed the suggestion of his staff and, carrying the principle still further, have sent both battalions against the Twin Peaks and main ridge, with orders to work to the left and join hands with the defenders of the main summit.

Lyttelton sends two battalions to help.

Soon after 10.30, in accordance with a request from the summit transmitted by Buller to Lyttelton, the eight naval 12-pounders and the two howitzers on the Maconochie Kopjes and above Potgieter's opened fire on the eastern slopes of Spion Kop and on the Aloe Knoll. Before this the sailors on Mount Alice had, with their telescope, picked out the Boers moving among the rocks on the southern face of the Aloe Knoll, and had turned the two 4·7's upon them with excellent results. But no sooner had the naval guns begun making things uncomfortable for the Boers on Aloe Knoll when an agitated message reached Buller and Lyttelton from Warren:—

Warren stops the naval guns.

"We occupy the whole summit and I fear you are shelling us seriously; cannot you turn your guns on the enemy's guns?"

Lyttelton at once (11 A.M.) stopped fire. Half an hour later, when àCourt, who had left Warren at 10.15, reached Buller, the guns resumed, but stopped again in deference to a renewed urgent message from Warren, and though firing was from time to time renewed against the Aloe Knoll and the eastern edge of Spion Kop no systematic attempt was again made at effective co-operation with the infantry on the hill. The fact is that Warren, from first to last, never realized that Woodgate had not occupied the whole summit but only the larger western half. From where he was he could not see the Aloe Knoll, and knew nothing of its existence. The only message he got from Crofton (received 11.50 A.M.), in reply to his questions where the enemy's fire came from, mentioned front and flanks, but attempted no description of the ground.

Buller's intervention. Thorneycroft appointed to command. 11.45 A.M.

It was on this eastern side, indeed, that the British artillery could have been most effective that day. South of Spion Kop the ground offered opportunities for a converging artillery fire upon the Aloe Knoll and the main ridge east of it hardly inferior to those enjoyed by the Boers on the far side. But if the opportunity for the effective co-operation of the guns was thrown away the fault was not Warren's. Buller, on Spearman's, was in the central and commanding position. Ever since the fire drove the signallers from the western edge of the summit, most of the messages sent down from the summit* came to the station at Mount Alice and were brought to him before being sent over to Warren. He alone had the authority to direct every unit in the force, and could have brought round field batteries and infantry to clear the whole eastern flank of Crofton's position by a combined attack. His word was law, and his orders still inspired unquestioning confidence in the mass of his troops. Now, if ever, was the time to resume his authority, to galvanize Warren into activity, to bring the weight of his whole army to bear upon the Boer line, thin before and now everywhere weakened in order to bring enough rifles into action against Spion Kop. But Buller had

* Not all; some were sent by the R.A. signallers on the south-west side and later from Coke's signal station. See pp. 258, 272, 278.

divested himself of the responsibility of command; all he reserved to himself was the privilege of occasional intervention. He had stopped Lyttelton's demonstration earlier in the morning—wisely, perhaps. Later on he was to interfere with fatal effect in Lyttelton's successful efforts to relieve the situation. He interested himself in the doings of the naval guns, and at 11.30 A.M. asked Warren if he would like two 12-pounders, an offer Warren eagerly accepted. And now, after listening to àCourt's account of the night march, and of the energy and ability shown by Thorneycroft, it occurred to him that it would be a good thing if Thorneycroft commanded on the top of the hill instead of Crofton, who had apparently lost his head. He accordingly sent the following message to Warren (11.45 A.M.):—

"Now Woodgate is dead I think you must put a strong commander on top; I recommend you put Thorneycroft in command."

Warren immediately heliographed to Crofton that Thorneycroft was, with the Commander-in-Chief's approval, placed in command of the summit, with the rank of brigadier-general. He did not consider it necessary to inform Coke, who was already on his way up the hill, of his interference with the relative position of the latter's subordinates, a piece of negligence fraught with disastrous consequences.

The situation on the summit. 9.30 A.M. Boers reach the crest.

In these last two and a half hours the situation on the summit had become more desperate every moment. From the first the whole brunt of the fighting fell on the forward sections lining the crest. Crofton, Blomfield, and Thorneycroft worked their hardest to send forward supports. But the ground between the trenches and the crest was swept by a devastating fire, and cover on the crest itself was scanty. Before long the Boers were at the crest. Nothing was visible, but the crack of bullets fired at close quarters and the sudden cessation of the shelling told their tale. The shouts from the crest-line for support became more frequent and more anxious. At last, here and there among the rocks on the crest, appeared the unmistakable slouch hat and the gleaming Mauser barrel. Then, for a while, the defence asserted itself

with renewed vigour. Men who had hitherto found nothing in particular to fire at, and had, with the characteristic nonchalance of the British soldier, lain idle and indifferent in the trenches, sprang up and began to fight in earnest. The firing redoubled in intensity. Before long, too, the Boer gunners reopened fire, dropping their shells with deadly accuracy into the main trench and over the ground in front of it within a few yards of their own men. The incessant roar and crackle of musketry as it rose and fell; the whistling of the bullets rising to a screech as they ricocheted among the rocks; the booming of the guns and shriek of bursting shrapnel; the constant undertone of human voices, the orders of the officers, the shouts for reinforcements, the guttural exhortations in the *taal*, the agonized ejaculations of the wounded, the groans of the dying—all combined into one indescribable din in the glaring sunshine beating down on that little death-swept patch of stony hill-top.

9.30–11.45 A.M. Boers gradually clear the crest.

It was on the right of the line, where the cross-fire from the Aloe Knoll and the slopes of the main ridge was hottest, that the Boers first got on to the crest, driving the survivors of the Lancashire Fusiliers' firing-line back to the main trench (9.30–10.30 A.M.). Blomfield fell wounded on the right of the line and was dragged under cover of the trench. Once on the crest the Boers turned upon the nearest section of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry and wiped it out almost immediately. Then creeping forwards up the slope they worked round the right rear of the next section and proceeded to destroy that, too. The firing-line was being eaten away, and, in possession of so large a part of the crest, the Boers could prevent any supports getting forward to the rest. Thorneycroft sent forward Lieutenant Sargeant with twenty men to hold a patch of rocks on the crest to his right front and check the Boers working round (10.30 A.M.). They rushed across and reached them at the same moment that the enemy occupied them from the other side. For a few minutes they held their own, but the Boers fairly shot them out of the rocks, and the remnant scattered back to the trench. The Boers now opened so intolerable a fire from these rocks that

Thorneycroft determined to clear them out at all costs. He collected forty men—T.M.I. and Lancashire Fusiliers—in the main trench, and ordering them to fix bayonets, led them across the open (11 A.M.). They got half-way, but the fire that met them was too much even for the bravest. They threw themselves down and began firing, Thorneycroft kneeling behind a rock and firing his Mauser pistol. But it could not last, and in a few minutes the handful that remained unhit jumped up and ran for the trench. Thorneycroft fell, twisting his knee, but regained the trench in safety. On the left, Crofton worked no less hard to maintain his hold on the crest-line. But the Boers working up from the north-western spur got into the rocks on the extreme northern salient of the plateau, and their cross-fire now dislodged the remainder of the T.M.I. and Royal Lancasters on the northern crest. But the westernmost salient, whose flank was covered by a slight fold in the ground, was maintained throughout the day, and as long as this was held the main trench could not be enveloped.

Critical situation on summit.

By 11.45 A.M. the last scattered remnants of the defenders of the northern crest-line were driven back or destroyed, and the whole line occupied by the Boers. The main trench now became the British advanced line, and at 100 yards' range the fight was renewed with desperate energy. But the trench was beginning to be choked with dead and wounded. Many of the unwounded had lost heart and lay cowering in it without daring to expose their heads to the murderous fire. It soon became seriously short of men actually fighting. Ammunition still occasionally reached the trench, or was passed along from the reserve originally placed in it, but reinforcements had practically ceased. Every man who could be induced to face the fire had been brought forward by the repeated gallant efforts of the officers. As on Wagon Hill, the Engineers were in the foremost line with the infantry, and their commanding officer, Major Massy, was killed leading forward some men of mixed regiments from the rear trenches. A certain number lined these rear trenches, firing steadily. But there were many whom the fire had completely demoralized. These huddled together in batches

on the reverse slope of the summit wherever the ground seemed to offer cover, every now and again driven in aimless terror from one part of the slope to the other, as the hail of shrapnel or the strings of pom-pom shells, flicking round the shoulder of the hill like the lash of a gigantic whip, searched out their places of refuge. Others, busying themselves with the wounded, fetching water, or simply without pretext, began dribbling away down the hill. The craving for water, indeed, was terribly strong. A small spring of muddy water had been discovered some way up the spur and improved by the Engineers, and the arrangements made by Warren's staff provided a limited supply for the wounded, and ultimately for the unwounded also. But no water reached the firing-line, and under the fierce mid-day sun the British soldier, untrained to endure thirst, suffered tortures unknown to his more abstemious enemy.

Thorneycroft is informed of his appointment.

It was at this most critical moment in the struggle that Crofton received Warren's message appointing Thorneycroft to the command. For the moment the change in the command made no difference, for both Crofton and Thorneycroft were much too busy keeping their sections of the firing-line intact to have any time to spare for general supervision. But Crofton, unconscious of the cause and circumstances of his supersession, may well have wondered at being suddenly deprived of the authority he had been exercising for the last three hours. He sent on the message to Thorneycroft. The first messenger fell dead across Thorneycroft's legs with his message undelivered. Shortly afterwards, Lieutenant Rose, T.M.I., crept up to him and shouted: "Sir C. Warren has heliographed that you are in command; you are a general"—a message whose full purport Thorneycroft did not realize at the time.* At the same time Rose mentioned

* The actual message as received was taken on by the signalling officer, who, stopping on the way to lead forward a rush of men to a point where reinforcements were being urgently called for, dropped the message—afterwards picked up by a Boer—and, getting involved in the thick of the firing, failed to discover Thorneycroft till many hours later. This circumstance may help to explain why from the time of Thorneycroft's appointment onwards no messages from Warren to him seem ever to have reached their destination.

that he saw reinforcements coming up, and Thorneycroft sent him back to order them to the right, which was hardest pressed.

Botha sends up reinforcements.

With the capture of the crest-line the Boer advance was for a time brought to a standstill. The storming party had lost heavily in clearing the crest, and now they found that, in the teeth of the fire from the trenches, they could not push a yard in front of it without suffering even heavier losses. Owing to the shape of the summit they could no longer reckon upon the same amount of supporting fire as they advanced, and here and there, exhausted by their efforts and disheartened at the prospect of a still harder task before them, they began to waver and make their way down the hill. Botha, on the little kopje in the plain which commanded a view of the whole position, bent his utmost energies to the reinforcement of the firing-line. Picking up the first detachments now arriving from the Ladysmith laagers, and making still further demands upon his right, reduced by now to a mere skeleton, he sent up the hill all whom, by persuasion or threats, he could induce to face the fearful fire on the crest. But Botha did not merely send forward reinforcements. Unlike the generals opposed to him he knew where to place his men to secure the best tactical results. A contingent of Utrechters, straight from Ladysmith, was sent to reinforce the men of their commando on the Green Hill, and add volume to the supporting fire against the British left, to turn which other detachments were hurried up to the crest of Spion Kop under the slopes of the north-western spur. The main body of reinforcements was sent up the donga which ran up towards the saddle between the Aloe Knoll and the rest of the summit, in order to get round the eastern flank of the trenches and crush in the whole British line from its right. At the same time the Krupp on the plain was moved on to the slopes of Tabanyama to strengthen the enfilading fire on the main trench, while Burger was asked to help with another gun from his side, which was galloped round from the extreme left and came into action an hour later. An attempt to drag one of the pom-poms up to the knoll at the end of the north-western spur proved unsuccessful; a wheel broke, and the

damaged weapon, propped up by stones, resumed its work from a point near Botha's headquarters.

1 P.M. Surrender of men on British right which Thorneycroft vainly attempts to stop.

The Boers now had fully 600 rifles on the summit or just below it, and the firing became more furious than ever. This was the critical moment of the day for the British. The right of the main trench, chiefly manned by Lancashire Fusiliers, was the most sorely pressed. From the first moment of the attack it had been subjected to a merciless enfilade fire, continued without intermission now for nearly five hours. Again and again the officers, with splendid courage, had led forward fresh men to fill the gaps between the dead and wounded, but one after another they had been shot down. This whole section of the defence was now practically officerless. And now the Boer reinforcements, headed by a party of Pretorians, under Commandant Opperman and Field-Cornet Zeederberg, began to press closer upon them. At last the *moral* of the men gave way, and the disaster that had for some time seemed inevitable took place. Handkerchiefs were held over the trench. The Boers ceased firing, and one or two showed themselves. They were immediately shot down by men who had not seen * the white flag, and the firing was renewed as fiercely as ever. Again the signal of submission fluttered over the parapet. "Come out!" yelled the Boers, but no one stirred. Jan Celliers, of the Pretoria commando, boldly ran forward and leapt over the parapet into the trench, shouting "Who is your officer?" Other Boers followed, waving handkerchiefs. The firing ceased and the men in the trenches stood up, holding up their hands. At this moment a sergeant of the T.M.I. came up. A private wrenched his rifle out of his hand and said, "You are a prisoner."

* This as a matter of fact, but there is no intention of implying that British soldiers who had seen it would not have been justified in shooting. Much nonsense was talked and written on the subject during the earlier stages of the war, and much unnecessary outcry raised against the Boers when incidents similar to the one described above occurred. There can be only one valid rule, and that is for both sides to disregard all signals of surrender in a battle except an authorized white flag from a senior officer. In cases like the above the soldier's duty is to fire at any of the enemy who show themselves, and at any of his own side whom he sees making signals of surrender.

"No, no," said the sergeant, not fully comprehending what was happening; "they're surrendering to us. The reinforcements have come." Then suddenly realizing the truth, he rushed to find his colonel. Thorneycroft was near the angle of the trench, too intent on maintaining his own portion of the defence to notice what was going on elsewhere. Calling to the remnant of men left with him to follow and do exactly as he did, he rushed up to the Boers, a great, burly, limping figure, and shouted, "I'm commandant here; take your men back to hell, sir! There's no surrender." But there was surrender. The men made no attempt to rally. The Boers were already swarming on the summit. Delay was fatal. Shouting to his little band to follow, Thorneycroft rushed back across the plateau to shelter behind the rocks above the dressing station at the southern edge, while promiscuous firing opened at point blank range (1 P.M.).

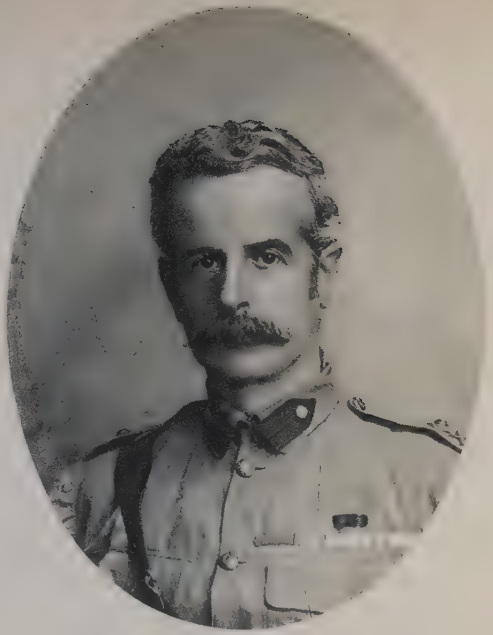
Reinforced by the Middlesex Thorneycroft drives Boers off the crest. Second panic stopped by Crofton and Middlesex.

For a few minutes the Boers were too busy disarming and passing back their prisoners—167, according to Boer accounts, belonging to the different Lancashire battalions—to use their opportunity and rush the little handful of men firing from the rocks in front of them. But more Boers were coming up every minute. It was a desperate moment. But for the Boers it had come just too late. The British reinforcements were arriving. One company of the Middlesex had already reached the trenches on the left before noon. Another on the right had pushed round past the dressing station and worked along the eastern slope to a broken-down sheep kraal. From here Major Savile had led forward a section with fixed bayonets to stop the surrender at the same moment that Thorneycroft came from the other side. In the promiscuous firing that ensued he was wounded and his men driven back. Another company was just coming forward. Thorneycroft picked them up, reformed his own men, and then, with an irresistible rush, swept his yelling line across the plateau and upon the Boers. Down the hill fled the Boers and with them ran the rest of their demoralized prisoners. The charge spent itself on the crest, where the men stood pouring volleys upon the retreating enemy. But the Boer gunners, who had ceased firing to enable their men to reach the trench, reopened again

with a crash and drove Thorneycroft and his triumphant men back to the cover of the trench. Once more the Boers rallied to the attack and lined the crest. And now it was the centre of the line that was in greatest danger. A number of Boers pressed forward over the crest and most gallantly headed straight for the middle of the main trench, a little to the right of the angle. The men in the trench suddenly lost their heads and broke back in a body (1.45 P.M.). Crofton rushed forward to rally them, and Bugler Russell at his side sounded the "advance." The men began to come back, and with them, once again in the nick of time, Captain Dyer's company of the Middlesex, scrimmaging their way through the panic-stricken mob in rear, swept forward and reoccupied the trench. The rest of the Middlesex, under Major Blake, and the first companies of the Imperial Light Infantry were now rapidly coming up, and were everywhere pushed in among the remnants of the original force. The hill was saved, but only Thorneycroft's and Crofton's promptitude and the timely arrival of the Middlesex had averted a second Majuba.

Thorneycroft reports to Warren. 2.30 P.M.

And still in the angle of the main trench, or crawling from point to point, Thorneycroft inspirited his men, forwarded ammunition, and pushed in reinforcements as they came up. For six hours he had been the life and soul of the firing-line, and it was not till after 2 P.M. that the situation was sufficiently secure to let him snatch a respite and creep back to the big out-crop of rocks in the centre of the plateau. For the first time since his appointment to the command was he able to direct the defence from a somewhat more central position. Even now he was much too far forward for really effective general direction. A position further in rear would have given him a better grasp of the situation, and have enabled him to get into touch with other officers as they came on to the hill. But the situation in the firing-line was still serious enough, and Thorneycroft may well have felt that there was no one else who could take his place in an emergency; no one who, by the strength of his personality or the confidence he inspired, could maintain the defence if once again the fate of the day should hang in the balance.



MAJOR-GENERAL THE EARL OF DUNDONALD, C.V.O., C.B.,
COMMANDING 2ND MOUNTED BRIGADE, NATAL.
Photo by Faulkner & Co.

COLONEL A. W. THORNEYCROFT, C.B.,
Photo by Dickinson & Foster.

Rightly or wrongly, his appointment notwithstanding, the work he chose to do that day, and did splendidly, was colonel's work rather than general's work. At 2.30 P.M. he wrote the following despatch to Warren, sending it down by Colonel Sandbach, of Buller's staff, who had come up to inspect the state of affairs on the summit:—

"Hung on till last extremity with old force. Some of the Middlesex here now, and I hear Dorsets coming up, but force really inadequate to hold such large perimeter. The enemy's guns on N.W. sweep the whole of the top of the hill. They also have guns E.; cannot you bring heavy artillery fire to bear on N.W. guns? What reinforcement can you send to hold the hill to-night? We are badly in need of water. There are many killed and wounded. If you wish to make a certainty of hill for night you must send more infantry and attack enemy's guns."

Coke on the first plateau.

Coke, meanwhile, had been slowly making his way up the hill. From the reports of the men who were dribbling down the hill for one cause or another, he gathered the impression that the summit was too crowded—as indeed it was, though the actual firing-line was short of rifles—but that otherwise there was no cause for immediate anxiety. He accordingly sent forward an order that no reinforcements, except the leading half-battalion of the Middlesex and three companies of the Imperial Light Infantry, who had already passed the second plateau,* were to go beyond that point, and ordered the rear half-battalion of the Middlesex to fire long-range volleys at the Boer supports on the Green Hill. There is everything to be said for the principle of Coke's decision not to reinforce the summit, but to deal instead with the enemy who were harassing the defenders. But the means employed were quite inadequate. It was in Coke's power, as commander of the whole "right attack," to order an advance of all his available battalions up the valley on his left to clear the Green Hill and north-western spur of Spion Kop. Or he might have attempted to work round to the

* There were three plateaux on the *arête*, the first where Coke now made his signal station, the second two-thirds of the way up, and the third, marked by a clump of trees, just below the rear slope of the summit.

right, using Lyttelton's battalions to help him, and bringing into action the battery* on the hill above Wright's Farm, or getting others round from Three Tree Hill. But where Buller and Warren had no plan for definite tactical action it is difficult to blame Coke.

Coke continues ascent; forwards Thorney-croft's report.

He was now on the first plateau, and, having established a signalling station there, informed Warren of his impression that the force on the summit was overcrowded and suffering from shell-fire, but "holding on well," and of the steps he had taken (12.50 P.M.). He little realized the scene that was being enacted on the summit at that very moment. It was not till about 1.15 P.M.—on receipt of an urgent request for reinforcements from Hill, mentioning that part of the line had fallen back, and that some men had been taken prisoners—that he ordered up the second half-battalion of the Middlesex and the remaining five companies of the Imperial Light Infantry.† Realizing, too, that the situation was more serious than he had thought, he decided to go up and see for himself, and proceeded slowly up the spur. Some way up he met Major Bayly of Lyttelton's staff, who informed him of what the latter was doing to assist. Pending further development on the summit, he ordered Bethune's Mounted Infantry and the Scottish Rifles to halt at the point where they reached the main spur (2.30 P.M.). At 3 P.M. Thorneycroft's message was shown him, and he sent it on with a brief covering message, mentioning the reinforcements already on the summit or on their way, and summing up the situation with the words: "We appear to be holding our own at present." One of his staff officers, Captain Phillips, whom he had sent forward to the summit some time before, had been informed that Crofton was wounded, and so he, no doubt, assumed that Thorneycroft had written either as the senior unwounded officer on the summit before Hill's arrival, or simply as an officer in whom Warren placed great

* Just before this (11.40 A.M.) Coke had ordered the horses of this battery to be used in an unsuccessful attempt to drag the Dorsets' machine-gun up the hill.

† The Middlesex had, however, been summoned up by Hill's brigade-major, Bonus, before the order reached them.

confidence, and whom he might have asked for his views. At any rate, there was nothing on the face of the message to indicate Thorneycroft's exceptional position. Sandbach apparently did not refer to it. There was nothing that could lead Coke to suspect that anybody could dispute Hill's authority as the senior officer on the summit. In view of further urgent requests for reinforcements in the centre and on the left, he now sent forward the whole of the Scottish Rifles, with the exception of one company, which he detained to help carrying up water.

3.15–3.45 P.M. Scottish Rifles reinforce left.

The Scottish Rifles reached the summit not a moment too soon. Thorneycroft's charge had made good the front of the line. But the danger to the flank was as serious as ever. Colonel Cooke now led the foremost company of the Scottish Rifles to the front trench in fine style under a heavy fire. Other companies came up, going to left and right alternately. Two of these moved to the extreme left, and working forward below the crest, opened fire on the Boers on the north-western spur and effectively prevented a turning movement from this quarter. But part of the main trench itself, to the left of the angle, was now beginning to show signs of demoralization. It would seem that here, too, signals of surrender had been shown and the Boers had begun to advance once more. But a newly-arrived company of the Scottish Rifles charged forward, and the Boers fell back. The left was now made good, and remained secure for the rest of the day.

The fight on the eastern slope.

On the right the situation was even more serious. Without attempting to regain their momentary hold on the main trench, the Boers had pushed determinedly forward along the eastern slope of the summit. Here they were completely sheltered from the view of Thorneycroft or of any of the troops in the original position, because the supporting fire from the Aloe Knoll and the main ridge made any movement over the edge of the slope impossible. In fact the only approach to this part of the summit was along the narrow shelving strip between the ridge of rocks along the south-eastern edge of the central plateau and the precipitous southern edge of the summit. Along this the first companies

of the Middlesex and Imperial Light Infantry had made their way, and had soon become hotly engaged in what was practically an entirely separate fight, adjacent to the fight on the original position, but absolutely cut off from it by the bullet-swept bevel of the slope. From 2 P.M. onwards this was the real battleground on which the fate of the summit depended, and it was to this that Hill's attention and that of Coke's staff officers was almost wholly directed. This separation of the fight on the summit into two portions, invisible and almost unknown to each other, is most important, for it lies at the bottom of much of the misunderstanding and confusion that arose that day, and of much of the subsequent controversy. It makes more intelligible what otherwise would seem altogether incomprehensible, that for four or five hours Hill and Thorneycroft should have been within 200 yards of each other, each believing himself to be in command, each unaware that the other was either exercising or assuming any such authority, and each satisfied that the fight in front of him was the main action and that the situation on the other wing was not serious enough to call for his personal intervention.

The Middlesex on the slope. Boers press forward. Timely arrival of Scottish Rifles. 3.45 P.M.

The advance of Major Savile's company of the Middlesex on the upper portion of the slope has already been mentioned. Somewhat later Captain Muriel made a most gallant attempt to lead his men across the slope towards the farther edge of the saddle, but fell wounded, and, like many a brave soldier, lay exposed for some hours till a fatal bullet found him. An equally gallant effort, and one which, if properly supported, would have changed the whole fortunes of the day, was made by Major Scott-Moncrieff to work along the southern crest of the summit and outflank the deadly Aloe Knoll, the key of the whole position. He fell wounded in five places, and those of his men who remained unwounded gradually crept back to cover. Fresh companies of the Middlesex and Imperial Light Infantry were continually brought forward. The volunteers, though freshly raised and undisciplined, again and again pushed fearlessly across the open. Their baptism of fire was a most bloody one, and the spirit in which they faced it showed the stuff they were made of. To and

fro on the slope the fight wavered—there were no trenches here—the officers ever and anon rallying and leading forward the groups of men as they broke under the deadly Boer fire. But gradually the Boers pushed forward and the British fell back, leaving a few prisoners, till at last almost the whole slope was abandoned. Already some thirty or forty Boers had worked up to the eastern end of the ridge of rocks in rear of the central plateau. Here they were directly in rear of Thorneycroft's position, while they had only to push on a few yards to be able to cover the whole reverse of the summit, and fire with terrible effect into any reinforcements making their way to the trenches. As the leading company of the Scottish Rifles now charged across the plateau, the Boers leapt up and poured a rapid cross-fire into their ranks. It was a critical moment. But as the Boers were firing over the rocks, Captain O'Gowan, following close with the second company, which had been ordered to the right, led forward his men and some of the next two companies with fixed swords, and charged them in flank and rear. The Boers were surprised and fell back, losing heavily as they fled (3.45 P.M.). Once again the situation was saved in the nick of time.

4.30 P.M. The fight becomes stationary.

Once more the British advanced, but though parties of the Scottish Rifles pushed forward some way down the slope and towards the Aloe Knoll, losing heavily in the attempt, no substantial progress was made. From about 4.30 P.M. onwards the fight became stationary on this side of the summit, as it had already been for some time on the left, the British holding from the end of the rocks across to the nose of the small buttress or promontory that marks the south-eastern point of the summit. The Boers, too, on their side, worn out by their heroic efforts, everywhere withdrew to the far crest. Botha realized that his men had shot their bolt and that the attempt to storm the hill, and win a second Majuba, had failed. But he still hoped that if he kept up a sufficiently heavy fire on the overcrowded summit, he might yet hammer the British so terribly that they would be forced to evacuate the hill at nightfall. He accordingly ordered his gunners to redouble their efforts. With mathe-

matical accuracy the Boer guns searched the summit from side to side and from end to end, while their riflemen swept it with a heavy and incessant stream of bullets. There were now about 2,000 men on the actual summit,* exclusive of the 400 or 500 dead and wounded lying about among them, and there was only cover for 1,000 at the most. The main trench was choked from end to end with dead, wounded, non-fighters, and men so utterly exhausted that, in spite of the inferno raging round them, they had gone fast asleep, and the reinforcements had to lie out behind it. The Boer guns were few, but in these serried lines of men they wrought terrible havoc.

Capture of the Twin Peaks by the 60th Rifles. 1–5 P.M.

A mile to the east, meanwhile, events were happening which were before long completely to upset Botha's calculations—for a time at least. The 60th Rifles had crossed the Kaffir Drift at 1 P.M., and moved cautiously north-eastwards for a mile or more, before coming under fire from the mountain. They then swung round for the attack, the right half-battalion, under Colonel Buchanan-Riddell, making for the eastern, and the left, under Major Bewicke-Copley, for the western of the Twin Peaks. As they gained the foot of the hills and began the steep ascent they came under a moderately heavy fire (2 P.M.). But the Rifles had been diligently practising this very manœuvre, and skilfully spread out and making good use of cover, the attacking line clambered up the almost precipitous hill-side, while the supports in rear kept up a heavy fire on any of the defenders who ventured to push forward and try to stop the assault. The efforts of the supports were amply seconded by the naval guns, which liberally plastered the ridge and the summit of the peaks with their shells. The covering fire and the steepness of the hill almost completely protected the storming party, and it was only from the flanks, where the Boers were dotted about among the rocks on the face of the mountain, that they were subjected to a galling cross-fire. From

* *Viz.*, 600–700 of the original force; 400–500 Middlesex; 400 I.L.I.; 500–600 Scottish Rifles. Supporting companies of the reinforcing battalions, as well as Bethune's M.I. and the Dorsets, were at various points from the top of the reverse slope downwards.

Spearman's the attack seemed far more difficult than it really was, and Buller at once began sending messages to Lyttelton to withdraw the Rifles. Lyttelton himself was growing doubtful, and his doubts were confirmed by a message received about 2.30 from Major Bayly informing him that the Boers held the peaks and that he did not think the Rifles could take them. At 3 P.M. Lyttelton heliographed to them to retire, and repeated the message twice in the next hour. Fortunately someone seems to have been gifted with Nelson's great quality of occasional disobedience. The Rifles pushed slowly but steadily upwards. Schalk Burger, whose men were holding the main ridge and the peaks, sent urgent messages to Botha for reinforcements. Botha was desperately hard pressed for men to maintain the main attack. But he realized that the loss of the Twin Peaks would imperil the whole position and that it must be held at all costs. He despatched Edwards, chief of his corps of picked scouts, with every available man to reinforce Burger's men. But it was no good. The Rifles were now nearing the summit. At 5 P.M., under cover of a heavy fire from the left half-battalion and from the naval guns, the right half fixed bayonets and rushed the eastern peak with a cheer. A few minutes later the left half were in possession of their peak also. Away galloped Burger's guns down the slope of the eastern peak and the pom-pom from the slopes of the ridge, now exposed to fire from above; down the hill and off the open ridge streamed Burger's commandos and Botha's reinforcements. A certain number of resolute men remained ensconced among the rocks and kept up a nasty fire upon the peaks, but only a little effort more was wanted to clear the whole ridge between the Twin Peaks and the main summit. It was just as his men reached the summit that Buchanan-Riddell at last sent a temporizing reply to Lyttelton's messages to withdraw, saying that he would "recall the advanced sections" if it could be managed. None the less he took the rest of his men up to the summit, and a little later, while standing recklessly on the skyline to look at the valley below, was shot through the head and killed.

Coke on the summit. His interview with Hill. His message to Warren.

After sending forward the Scottish Rifles, Coke had followed slowly. At 3.50 P.M. he stopped to write a despatch to Warren, giving the general bearing of the guns on Tabanyama and adding that the summit was being cleared of Boers. He added no suggestion for any tactical move either by himself or by Warren, but he mentioned that more doctors, food, and especially water, were wanted. A little later, however, on getting on to the actual reverse of the summit, he considered the question of attempting to capture the north-western spur, only to dismiss it as too dangerous. From his staff officers, from Major Bayly, and others, Coke now gathered a general impression of the state of affairs on the centre and left of the position, but heard not a word about Thorneycroft being in command. He knew that the men were suffering severely from shell-fire; but they were holding their own, and he did not consider that the situation called for an attempt to get into direct touch with Thorneycroft or any other regimental officers who might be lying in the firing-line in front of him. Hill, he presumed, was in command, and this presumption was confirmed by the receipt of a message (dated 5.5 P.M.) from Hill, giving a brief summary of the situation and announcing his intention of holding on till dark and then intrenching. Coke accordingly made his way to the right and found Hill under the rocks (5.30 P.M.). Hill explained his views to Coke, mentioning that he had plenty of sandbags, as well as ammunition, which he had collected from the wounded and others whom he had found leaving the summit. From where he now was Coke could see the extreme right of the British firing-line shuffling about on the grassy spur under the Boer fire, and ordered Hill to steady it. While Hill went across to do so, Coke sat down and wrote the following despatch to Warren (5.50 P.M.):—

"The situation is as follows:—

"The original troops are still in position, have suffered severely, and the dead and wounded are still in the trenches. The shell-fire is, and has been, very severe.

"If I hold on to the position all night, is there any guarantee that our artillery can silence the enemy's guns? Otherwise to-day's

experience will be repeated, and the men will not stand another complete day's shelling. I have in hand Bethune's Mounted Infantry and the Dorset Regiment intact to cover a retirement.

"If I remain I will endeavour to utilize these units to carry food and water up to the firing-line.

"The situation is extremely critical. If I charge and take the kopje in front, the advance is several hundred yards in the face of the intrenched enemy in strength, and my position as regards the q.f. guns is much worse.

"Please give orders, and should you wish me to retire cover retirement from Connaughts' Hill."

He showed the message to Hill, who at first demurred to the suggestion of retirement contained in it, but expressed himself satisfied when Coke altered the word to "withdrawal"! He then gave a copy of it to Colonel Morris, attached to his staff, with orders to take it down to Warren. A few minutes later he followed himself, and, on reaching his signal station, repeated his message by lamp signals (7.50 P.M.).

Coke's attitude. Criticism of his conduct.

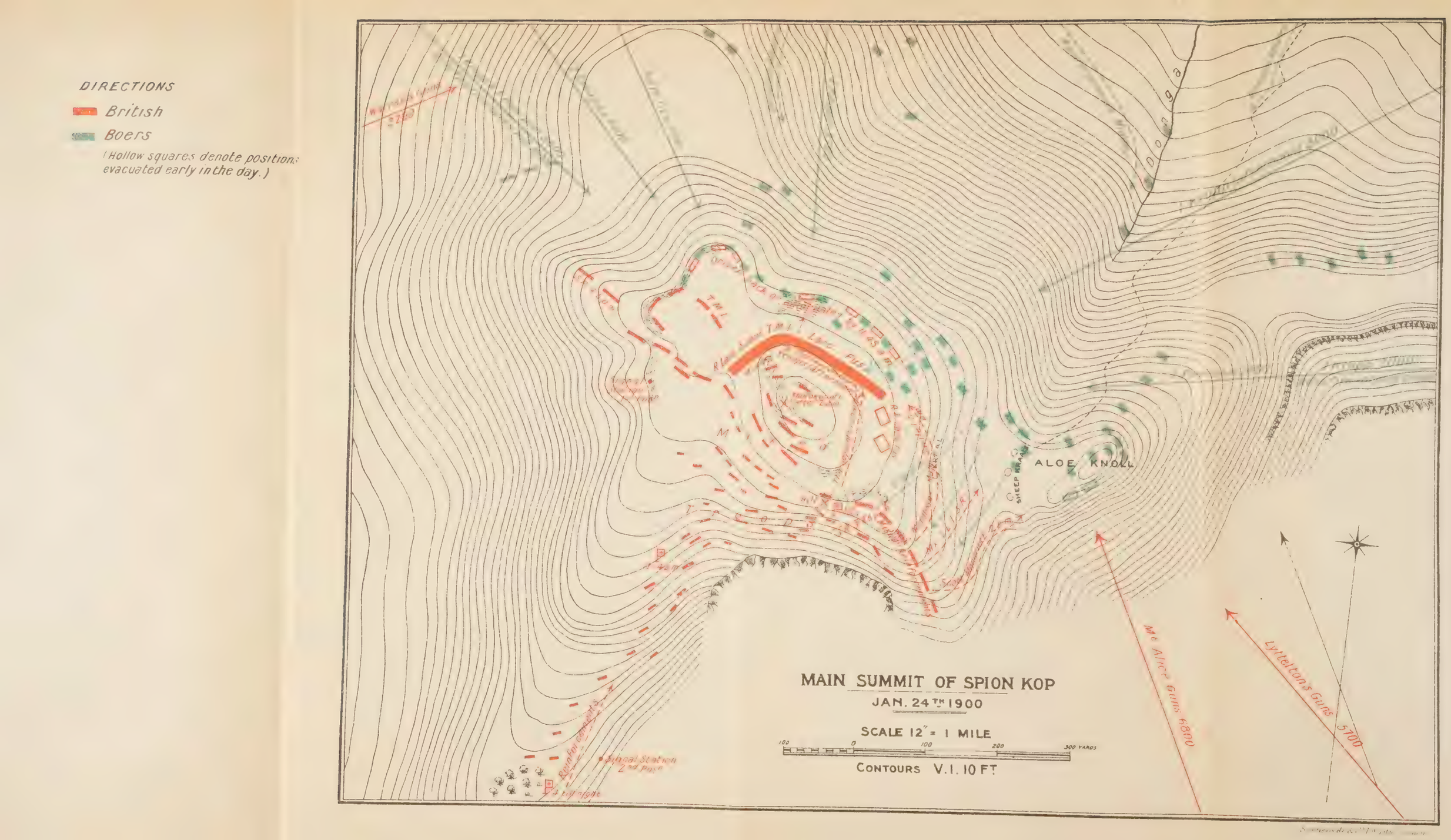
It is impossible to read Coke's message without coming to the conclusion that his brief stay amid the scene of confusion and demoralization on the rear slope of the summit had completely reversed the optimistic view of the situation he had hitherto held. The one thought now uppermost in his mind was withdrawal. He did not, of course, dream of taking so momentous a step without definite orders; nor would he even undertake the responsibility of directly advising it. But he suggested it as plainly as he could. And he suggested nothing else, for the mention of the north-western spur was so framed as practically to rule it out. Yet there was more than one alternative to abandoning the hill. Coke had seen the 60th Rifles capture the Twin Peaks, and it seems surprising that the idea of following up this success, by bringing up his supports to clear the Aloe Knoll and getting in touch with the Rifles, never occurred to him.*

* Captain Bonus, Hill's brigade-major, and other officers of the Middlesex and Scottish Rifles in the firing-line on the right seem, in the absence of any guidance from Hill or Coke, to have arranged among themselves to clear the Aloe Knoll after dark, a sound plan unfortunately frustrated by the retirement.

Again he might have urged upon Warren the necessity of operating elsewhere, by an attack that night or at daybreak, in order to draw off the pressure from Spion Kop. And even if it is too much to expect Coke to have planned any positive action with a tactical object, when neither Buller nor Warren dreamt of such a thing, yet, contemplating a mere passive defence of the summit, he should undoubtedly, in view of the critical condition of affairs, have stayed on the summit himself, and not left it till he had set on foot and supervised all the measures necessary for the safety of the force. He had been the last to leave Warren; he knew his ideas, and had also seen the preparations made for the bringing up of guns, water and ammunition. He was the only general officer on the mountain. Hill was, at the best, a mere extempore brigadier with practically no staff, and there were portions of three different brigades on the summit. There were no other operations of the "right attack" which might have necessitated Coke's presence elsewhere. No doubt Coke was anxious to get into touch with Warren, from whom he had received no message since he had started. Still to go down as he did, leaving an inexperienced officer like Hill to assert a by no means certain authority, and to restore order in a critical and confused situation, was a shuffling off of responsibility which it is difficult to justify.

Thorneycroft tries to get in touch with Coke.

About the time that Coke reached the rear of the summit, Cooke, of the Scottish Rifles, found Thorneycroft directing the defence from the centre of the little plateau, and discussed the situation with him. The question of command seems to have been raised, but Thorneycroft, in whose mind a good deal of uncertainty as to his exact position must still have existed, did not inform Cooke of Warren's message appointing him to the command. Up to this, Thorneycroft had sent no report or request for orders to Coke, who, as commander of the "right attack," was his own immediate superior—a fact of which Thorneycroft seems to have been as ignorant as Coke was of Thorneycroft's appointment. But he now agreed to Cooke's suggestion that the latter should go back to find Coke, settle who was really in command, and come back with definite instructions as to the necessary arrange-


DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
(Hollow squares denote positions evacuated early in the day.)
ALOE KNOLL
SHEEP KRAAL
Mt Alice Guns 6800
Lyttelton's Guns 5700
MAIN SUMMIT OF SPION KOP
JAN. 24TH 1900
SCALE 12" = 1 MILE
100 0 100 200 300 YARDS
CONTOURS V.I. 10 FT

ments to be made for the defence before the light failed. Cooke found the general with his staff below the rocks, and in answer to his first query was told that Hill was in command, Coke apparently hardly noticing to whom he was speaking. He went away, but returned a little later to urge his more important request for instructions. He found Hill, who told him that Coke had just gone down to communicate with Warren, that he was in command, and that his intention was to hold on till dark and then intrench and otherwise strengthen the position. Cooke asked Hill if he would come up and see if his position would do. Hill said he would come up in a few minutes, but that for the moment he wished to keep an eye on his right, which was rather shaky. Cooke had to be satisfied with this promise. He returned to Thorneycroft, and gave him his impression of what had passed.*

* The account given above is largely conjectural. But what inclines the writer to the belief that it is approximately correct is that it furnishes a reasonable explanation of the genesis of the absolutely contradictory versions of the parties concerned. According to Colonel Cooke it was with General Coke that he spoke on both occasions, and it was Coke who, somewhat apathetically, told him that he was going down to see Warren and that Hill would come soon. According to Coke, supported by all the staff officers who were with him that afternoon, Cooke never came to speak to him at all. Colonel Hill alone of the officers with Coke can remember seeing Cooke that afternoon, but not till after Coke had left, when the conversation given above took place. It is incredible that Cooke should have simply imagined a conversation with Coke, whom he knew by sight, and have at once reported it to Thorneycroft as he did. It is equally incredible that he should have had a detailed discussion with Coke which neither Coke nor his staff remembered. But considering the circumstances of the interviews, the excitement, the noise of battle, and the fire which swept even the rear of the summit, it is quite conceivable that, on the one hand, Cooke should have to some extent confused two conversations bearing upon the same subject, and that, on the other, Coke should not have paid much heed to a casual question addressed to him with reference to the command, or even have noticed the questioner. A further element of difficulty is introduced by the fact that, according to Thorneycroft, Cooke conveyed not merely a verbal message but the following written note: "I have been in command here for the afternoon. Will you please come and discuss the situation? It is impossible to hold the hill unless the Boer artillery fire is first silenced. There are two colonels senior to me here, and no one knows who is to give orders. We should have more men. The Boer fire is very hot." The note was undoubtedly written, for the original is still extant. But it is doubtful whether it was ever given to Cooke,

Thorneycroft tries to find Hill. His second despatch to Warren.

Thorneycroft had already earlier in the afternoon attempted to get in touch with Hill, and now again sent an officer to find him, but without success. Hill, though he considered himself in command, does not seem to have made his personality felt, and even on the right of the summit officers seem to have been entirely ignorant of his whereabouts. The approach of dusk and the indistinguishable khaki uniform no doubt contributed to the difficulty. Thorneycroft concluded that Hill was wounded or had left the summit, and in any case he was no longer so anxious to find him. For now, at last, he definitely learnt from Crofton that he had actually been appointed a brigadier, and was therefore senior to a mere acting-brigadier like Hill. He had also understood from Cooke that Coke had actually gone down to see Warren personally. He was now quite clear in his own mind that he was in undisputed command of all the troops on the summit and slopes of the hill, and responsible for the safety of the whole force. At 6.30 P.M. he accordingly wrote the following despatch to Warren:—

"The troops which marched up here last night are quite done up. They have had no water, and ammunition is running short. I consider that even with the reinforcements which have arrived it is impossible to permanently hold this place so long as the enemy's guns can play on the hill. They have three long-range guns, three of shorter range, and several Maxim-Nordenfelts, which have swept the whole of the plateau since 8 A.M. I have not been able to ascertain the casualties, but they have been very heavy, especially in the regiments which came up last night. I request instructions as to what course I am to adopt. The enemy are now (6.30) firing heavily from both flanks (rifle, shell, and Nordenfelt), while a heavy rifle-fire is being kept up on the front. It is all I can do to hold my own. If my casualties go on at the present rate I shall barely hold out the night.

"A large number of stretcher-bearers should be sent up, and also all the water possible.

"The situation is critical."

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and it certainly did not reach Coke. The contradictions in this instance are only typical of the character of a great deal of the evidence about battles in general, and this one more particularly.

In its general estimate of the situation the despatch was very similar to Coke's, and through it, as through Coke's, though less clearly expressed, can be read the opinion that the hill would have to be evacuated unless a complete change took place in the existing conditions. The possibility of remedying the tactical situation by pushing forward after dark to the Aloe Knoll or the north-western spur does not seem to have occurred to Thorneycroft any more than to Coke. Entrusting his despatch to a messenger, Thorneycroft set himself to maintain the defence through the short remaining period of light. At last the longed-for darkness began to descend, and with the waning light the firing gradually died away. Late in the evening gallant, red-bearded Opperman led a handful of his men along the eastern slope almost up to the end of the rocks, and opened a heavy fire on the Scottish Rifles at twenty yards' range. But he could make no further headway, and after a while, with those of his men who were unwounded, he crept back over the crest again (7 P.M.).

Close of the fighting on the summit.

During all these long hours Warren was busying himself with various minor arrangements for supporting the defence of Spion Kop. A depôt was created at the foot of Spion Kop, and ration wagons collected to enable the troops to be conveniently provisioned next day. On a report that the officers on the hill had forgotten to take any food with them a special supply was hurriedly collected in the general's mess and sent up. Staff officers were specially deputed to superintend the conveyance to the summit of water and ammunition. Telegrams passed to and fro, and staff officers were sent about to expedite the mountain battery and naval guns; guides were provided to show them the way up the mountain, and coils of rope placed in readiness to help hoisting them up.* At 4 P.M. Warren received a cheerful letter from Buller, written three or four hours earlier, containing some

Warren busy with minor arrangements.

* The mountain battery reached Trichardt's at 4 P.M., but Buller insisted on its resting and it did not reach the foot of Spion Kop till 7.30. The naval guns left the Maconochie Kopjes soon after midday and reached Wright's Farm about 5.30 P.M.; but it was not till after 9 P.M. that Lieutenant James received orders to go to Spion Kop.

suggestions with regard to intrenchments on Spion Kop and the proper shape for the gun epaulements. He now sent up an officer to select sites for the emplacements, ordered up all remaining sandbags and intrenching tools, telegraphed to Spearman's for the 37th Company, R.E., and for the balloon, and discussed arrangements to be made with Colonel Sim. Warren's efforts with regard to the guns and intrenching arrangements cannot by any stretch of language be called prompt or strenuous. Things which might have been thought of early in the day were not begun till well on in the afternoon, or even till long after dark. There seems to have been no recognition on Warren's part of the desirability of getting guns and working parties up before darkness increased the difficulties of the task. Slowness and procrastination marked his direction of affairs throughout this day as throughout all the preceding week.

Information about summit received by Warren during afternoon.

The urgency of the situation, it is true, was not realized by Warren till very late in the day, and not fully even then. In spite of several messages asking for information Warren could get no replies from the summit of Spion Kop for some hours after Thorneycroft's appointment, and he does not seem to have attempted to make up for the failure of the signalling communications by the despatch of orderlies. At 2.20 P.M., indeed, he received Coke's first message, which had apparently taken an hour and a half to travel two miles, and from it he gathered that there were sufficient troops on the hill and that there was no special pressing need. At 3.40 P.M. he received from Spearman's a brief summary of the situation taken from one of Major Bayly's messages to Lyttelton and mentioning no need except water and ammunition. The same need for water was practically the only suggestion in Coke's 3.50 P.M. message, which also mentioned that the hill was being cleared of Boers. About 4 P.M. Sandbach arrived, giving a generally satisfactory account of affairs on the summit, which he had left soon after Thorneycroft's charge had temporarily checked the Boers, and delivered Thorneycroft's 2.30 P.M. message with Coke's endorsement. Thorneycroft's despatch, indeed, showed that the situation in his eyes was serious, that things had been critical, that the enemy's

shell-fire was trying, and that reinforcements were required. But Coke's endorsement seemed to imply that the reinforcements sent were sufficient, and, not unnaturally, conveyed to Warren's mind the impression that Coke was in direct touch with Thorneycroft and was exercising an effective personal control over the operations. Nothing in these messages suggested that affairs were very critical. To some keen-eyed and imaginative spectators on Three Tree Hill, indeed, the sight of the leaderless crowd on the reverse slope of the summit, swaying uneasily to and fro as the shells chased them from side to side, seemed to foretell imminent disaster. But Warren was short-sighted and saw nothing of this. Devoting himself, for the present, to the arrangements for guns and intrenchments, he sent no instructions in answer to the messages, and in fact made no further attempt to get into touch with Spion Kop till 6.40 P.M., when he sent a message—which apparently never reached its destination—asking Coke if two battalions would suffice to relieve the original force and hold the summit. To hold Spion Kop and sit there, that was the only policy Warren contemplated. A few minutes later he sent the following characteristic message to Lyttelton :—

"The assistance you are giving most valuable. We shall try to remain *in statu quo* during to-morrow. Balloon would be of incalculable value."

8 P.M. Warren realizes seriousness of situation.

It was already dark when, at 8 P.M., Warren received by signal Coke's dispirited message written on the summit. A few minutes later Morris arrived and described the state of affairs on the hill as most critical. Warren seems to have treated Morris as an alarmist, but his view was confirmed immediately afterwards by Lieutenant Winston Churchill, of the South African Light Horse, who had gone up at 4 P.M. and now returned drawing a most disquieting picture of the demoralization of the troops, and of the apathy and ineffectiveness of Coke, Hill, and generally of everybody except Thorneycroft. The combined evidence of the two was convincing. Warren was at last galvanized into taking some sort of action. He sent Churchill up with instructions

personally to inform Thorneycroft of the preparations being made, and with a note asking for Thorneycroft's views on the situation (8.30 P.M.). Half an hour later he at last sent off Sim with orders to construct epaulements for two naval guns and the mountain battery, and to improve the trenches. Sim was to take 200 of the Somerset Light Infantry, carrying tools, and on arrival to draw two reliefs of 600 men each from the battalions in reserve to help in the work. He was also given a note for Thorneycroft urging him to hold on to the hill at all costs. Lieutenant James, commanding the naval guns, now also at last received orders to requisition a fatigue party and take one of his guns up the hill. But it was really too late. Sim and his working party might have got up in time to put in two or three hours improving the trenches before daybreak, but the construction of epaulements or the dragging up of guns in time to use them for the morrow's engagement was already out of the question. What it was not too late to do was to order a night or daybreak attack to relieve the pressure on Spion Kop. But that was no part of a military policy whose chief conception was the maintenance of the *status quo*.

Warren signals for Coke to come and see him.

The only further measure Warren could think of was to signal to Coke to come and see him, leaving Thorneycroft in command. He no doubt fancied that Coke had already made sufficient arrangements for the defence of the summit during the night, and may, perhaps, have gathered the impression that those arrangements would be quite as effectively carried out by Thorneycroft in Coke's absence. Nevertheless, it was a step which, under the critical circumstances, was of the most doubtful expediency, and in the event proved the very worst he could possibly have taken. Coke's judgment of the situation, which, when he wrote his 5.50 P.M. despatch, was undoubtedly affected by the scene on the hill-top, had become calmer and more dispassionate after his return to the signal station. The men of the original force were certainly played out, and he allowed them freely to straggle down the hill to look for water or provisions. But he had sufficient fresh troops to hold the hill for the present; food, water and ammunition were being sent up; guns and

engineers would no doubt follow. He had conveyed a much more reassuring account of affairs to Warren by Major Williams, who arrived at headquarters soon after 8.30 P.M.; and the idea of abandoning the hill no longer entered seriously into his calculations. He was now awaiting more precise instructions for the morrow. At 9.10 P.M. he received Warren's message. The idea of spending some hours stumbling about in the pitchy darkness, leaving his staff in complete ignorance of what decision was eventually to be taken, appalled him. He signalled back to Warren imploring him to let him stay. But having received no answer by 9.40 P.M. he considered it his duty to obey, and leaving Captain Phillips on the mountain side started for headquarters. Soon after he left Warren sent a message that it would do if he reported himself early next morning. But it was too late.

Buller recalls the Rifles.

Buller, too, had spent the day watching and telegraphing, though, unlike Warren, he did not even profess to be conducting the operations. With the state of affairs on Spion Kop, and with Warren's preparations for the night, he was content; at any rate, he was indisposed to interfere. The one measure that aroused the profoundest dissatisfaction in his mind was Lyttelton's despatching the 60th Rifles against the Twin Peaks. He sent down repeated orders, and their apparent ineffectiveness only increased his annoyance. The success of the movement in no way appeased him. He sent a peremptory order to Lyttelton demanding an explanation of his reasons for separating his battalions so widely, and asking for copies of the orders issued in the course of the afternoon. At 6 P.M. Lyttelton sent a last order recalling the 60th, explaining that it was impossible to support them in the position they had occupied. By the time the message arrived, Bewicke-Copley, who had succeeded to the command, had already, with admirable promptitude, gone down to the foot of the hill and brought up ammunition mules, water mules, and intrenching tools by a longer and far steeper climb than the Spion Kop *arête*, and was making arrangements for intrenching the position. But he could not disobey so direct an order. Moreover, some men, who

had come across from the main summit to the foot of the Twin Peaks on their way to camp, had reported that the main summit was being evacuated, and he imagined that, for some unknown reason, a general withdrawal must have been ordered.* The retirement began soon after 8 P.M., and at midnight the Rifles, guided by a blazing bonfire, reached the pontoon. They had lost 3 officers and 17 men killed, 4 officers and 65 men wounded; they had performed a most gallant exploit with equal skill and resolution; and the part they had played that day was more important than they or anyone in the British camp imagined.

Thorneycroft decides to abandon Spion Kop. His motives.

All day long Thorneycroft had conducted the defence of the original position on the summit with a courage and dogged resolution for which no praise can be too high. Except for the hurried message giving him the command, not one single syllable had reached him from below. He had waited an hour or more for the fulfilment of the promise that Hill should come to make arrangements "in a few minutes." The men on the summit were without food or water, and he had heard nothing of any arrangements to provide them. They were utterly worn out and to a great extent demoralized, and with darkness many began to leave the trenches and dribble down the hill. He knew that it had been intended to send up mountain guns. But there was no sign of their coming, and against the long-range Boer artillery they would be useless. Intrenching on the rocky hill-top was terribly difficult; his own men were too exhausted to improve their trenches, and he had heard nothing of other arrangements. All day, while his little force had been struggling and suffering on Spion Kop, he had seen the whole of Warren's army lying idle without moving a finger to help him.† What reason was there to expect any better help on the morrow? Nothing indicated any intention on Warren's part to attempt to silence or divert the terrible shell-fire that had scourged

* This was, of course, some time before any order to that effect was given by Thorneycroft, but it shows that the idea of evacuation was in the air among the troops on the main summit.

† Thorneycroft never knew of the capture of the Twin Peaks, one of the results of his too advanced and isolated position.

the summit. Coke had gone away without even attempting to get into touch with him. An overpowering sense of desertion, of betrayal, of mismanagement, of the useless waste of life during the day and of the certain destruction of the shattered remnant of his force on the morrow, took possession of him. The thing should not go on if he could help it. Warren had placed him in command, and made him responsible for the safety of the force. Well, then, it was for him to decide what to do with it. And his decision was to put an end to the business, to save his men from the needless slaughter which no military plan, no intelligible purpose, existed to justify; which could be demanded by nothing but sheer aimless, obstinate reluctance to confess a mistake and to abandon a point once occupied. He decided to abandon the hill and get the men safely away while it was yet possible. "Better six battalions safely off the hill than a mop-up in the morning," was his summing-up of the situation to Cooke and Crofton, whom he now summoned to an informal council of war, laying before them the reasons that to his mind made it impossible for the force to hold on another day. The others agreed, almost without discussion. The council only lasted a few minutes, and when it broke up Thorneycroft gave the order for the retirement. The men were fallen in, the Scottish Rifles forming the rear-guard, and carrying with them as many wounded as they could manage, began slowly retiring to the upper plateau (8.15 P.M.).

His action unjustifiable; only possible excuse the incapacity of his superiors.

On no theory of military conduct is it possible for an instant to justify Thorneycroft's action. He had been put in command to hold a position which, he knew, was, rightly or wrongly, considered important by his commanding officer. To decide for himself that the position was not worth holding was an assumption of authority which there was nothing in the circumstances to warrant. He did not even wait long enough to make it possible to receive an answer from Warren to his last despatch, though the retirement would have been equally possible at any hour up to midnight, and after. He could have sent an officer to the foot of the hill, or have gone himself, to inquire what arrangements were being made for guns or food; if he had done so he would still have found

Coke, and been able to receive definite orders from him, or to consult Warren by signal. But so far from doing this he did not even find out that a large number of sandbags and a considerable supply of water had been accumulated during the afternoon on the rear of the summit within 300 yards of him. He made no attempt to discover what the Boers were doing, nor did he pause to consider what must have been the effect upon them of those fiercely-pressed and repeated attacks repelled so often at close quarters. Thorneycroft was not demoralized, though no one could have done the work he did that day and retained a calm and balanced judgment. He simply had no intention of discovering whether anything was being done to maintain his force on the hill another day. With a sure instinct he had divined Warren's policy for the morrow, and stolidly and deliberately he now resolved not to carry it out, or sacrifice his men for the sake of maintaining the *status quo*. It is not as an error of judgment, nor as a collapse under excessive strain, but as an act of deliberate disobedience that Thorneycroft's decision must be judged. And, if it is to be excused, it must be excused on the grounds that in practice, if not in theory, sometimes make disobedience excusable. The unquestioning subordination of the private judgment, the self-sacrificing obedience prescribed by the military code of duty, presuppose a certain minimum of intelligent direction on the part of those in supreme command. If that is wanting the moral foundation of the code is undermined; there comes a point at which the system breaks down, when insubordination becomes excusable, perhaps even necessary. In this case the measure of Thorneycroft's excuse is the measure of Buller's and Warren's incapacity, and the reader may judge for himself if Buller or Warren had much right to complain if their officers failed them. Thorneycroft's disobedience may have been excusable; that it was necessary the event was to disprove.

Thorneycroft continues retirement in spite of Hill's protest and Warren's messages.

For more than two hours after Coke left him Hill had made no attempt to assert his authority, or to get in touch with any of the commanding officers on the summit. At last he roused himself from his lethargy, and proceeded to fulfil his promise of visiting Cooke's position. As he started he met a

company of his own regiment marching regularly and in order off the plateau. It was the head of the retiring column. He halted the men, ordered them to lie down, and set off to find Thorneycroft. With some difficulty he found him, and now discovered for the first time that Thorneycroft claimed to be in command. He protested against the retirement, but Thorneycroft replied that he was acting with a full sense of his responsibility, and in face of his fixed determination Hill gave way. The question of seniority between them was so open that a stronger man might have refused to yield, unless Thorneycroft could produce direct orders for the retreat from Warren—have halted his own battalion, have called upon other officers to stand by him, and have sent down to Coke for reinforcements. But Hill, exhausted and unnerved by the long day, was neither physically nor mentally a match for Thorneycroft. The retreat continued. An hour or more later Churchill arrived, gave Thorneycroft Warren's letter, and told him of the preparations that were being made. Thorneycroft was not to be moved from his purpose. At midnight, when he was three quarters of the way down the mountain, Thorneycroft met Sim with the fatigue party. He looked at Warren's letter, said it was too late, and ordered Sim back. Sim acquiesced, and, going back, stopped the guns and, subsequently, the 37th Company, R.E., which only reached the Engineers' bivouac at 1.30 A.M. Thorneycroft made his way to the foot of the mountain and went on to report his retirement to Warren.

Phillips manages to halt part of the force.

Phillips, whom Coke had left at his signal station, had lain down for a short rest just before the head of the retreating column reached him, and did not wake up till 11.30, when a great part of the troops had passed. He at once stopped the retirement, and urged Major Twyford of the Scottish Rifles to take his men up the hill again. Twyford agreed if ammunition and water could be got. Whilst he was procuring this Cooke appeared. Phillips informed him that the evacuation was entirely contrary to Coke's intention. But Cooke had definite orders from Thorneycroft, and declined to accept anything but equally definite orders from Coke. These Phillips could not produce. But Cooke consented to

stay till Phillips could procure them; and the Scottish Rifles, together with the Dorsets and Bethune's, who had refused to join in the retirement, remained above the signal station till morning.* Phillips went off to signal to Warren. And now, to crown all, he found that the oil in the lamps had failed. It was not till 2.30 A.M. that he obtained some oil and sent off a message announcing that an unauthorized retirement had taken place, but that the troops still held the lower slopes. Before this he had issued a written protest to all the commanding officers of regiments whom he could find. No answer came to the message, and at 4 A.M. the retirement was continued, Bethune's being the last to leave the hill.

Boer abandonment and reoccupation of the hill.

Meanwhile, events hardly less strange were happening on the other side of the mountain. As the afternoon wore on, Botha had realized that Spion Kop was not to be won that day. But his confidence remained unshaken. He knew that the British had been severely punished, and he meant to give them all the punishment the remaining hours of daylight allowed. When night fell he believed they would abandon the hill. This belief he communicated in a telegram to Joubert. The capture of the Twin Peaks, indeed, seriously altered the whole position. But even so Botha did not consider it hopeless, and at dark he and his staff descended from the hillock, whence he had directed the fight all day, to eat and rest, and to concert fresh plans for the morrow. But it was not long before news reached him which seemed to make all planning idle. A messenger sent to Schalk Burger returned to report that Burger and all his commandos had fled towards Ladysmith, believing that all was lost by the loss of the Twin Peaks—as, indeed, it ought to have been. Gradually, too, Botha gathered that his own men had not only, as he already knew, come down from the summit, but that the majority of them, wearied out and utterly disheartened by their long, fruitless endeavour, and by their losses, had given up all thought of further resistance and had gone off in every direction, to Colenso, to Ladysmith,

* There were also the two companies of Connaughts who had been in support on the lower slopes since daybreak.

towards the Free State passes. And as they fled they gave the alarm to the long trains of wagons, which, after recovering from their first surprise in the morning, had halted at a safe distance from the field of battle. From hour to hour the situation seemed more hopeless. Small parties of stalwarts, however, still hung on at the foot of the mountain and on Tabanyama, while away on the flanks most of the men who had been all day in the Brakfontein trenches, or out towards Acton Homes, had remained unconscious of the general panic in the centre. Botha himself was resolved not to go till absolutely forced. His resolution met with the reward it deserved. About 3.30 A.M. he received positive information, from some burghers who had climbed up the hill again to search for the body of a comrade, that the main summit and the Twin Peaks had both been completely abandoned by the British. Here at last was a ray of hope! Botha seized the occasion at once, and sent officers to Acton Homes to bring every man they could find, while others climbed Spion Kop and corroborated the tidings of its abandonment. In the grey dawn Botha and his scanty following reoccupied the summit (4.30 A.M.). As they gazed down upon the British army lying inactive in its bivouacs, and then looked back at the great plain, dotted as far as the eye could reach with the débris of their own fugitive commandos, the simple burghers may well have ascribed their deliverance to a Higher Power, which had rewarded their steadfastness by smiting their enemy with a deadly palsy.

Coke and Thorneycroft reach Warren's camp. 2 A.M. Jan. 25.

It was not till after 2 A.M. that Coke reached Warren's headquarters. Warren had changed his camp a short distance, as it had attracted the attention of one of the Boer gunners on Tabanyama in the course of the day. He had neglected to inform Coke, with the result that the wretched Coke spent two hours stumbling about in the dark after his arrival at the original site of the camp. Thorneycroft's 6.30 P.M. message arrived about the same time, having been nearly eight hours in coming. A few minutes later Thorneycroft came himself and reported what he had done. At that moment (2.30 A.M.) there were still some 1,600 men on the slopes of Spion Kop. Phillips was signalling for

instructions. The Boers were not to begin ascending the hill for another hour or more. An instant message to reoccupy the hill with all troops available would even now have saved the situation. But to do that required the courage and quick resolution of a Louis Botha. Warren accepted the situation. Indeed, he accepted much more. He telegraphed to Buller to come over and see him—the first request of the kind since the day Buller had given him his command—and he asked for guns to be sent to cover the pontoon from the south bank, a request that could bear only one meaning.

Buller takes over command and orders withdrawal across the Tugela.

At dawn Buller arrived. Warren, meanwhile, had recovered from the first shock of the evacuation. He had sent a message to Colonel Burn-Murdoch, commanding the Royals, to reconnoitre the hill, and discover if it was occupied.* When Buller came Warren opened the question of what measures were to be taken, and expressed his belief that the Boers were retreating. But it was too late. For days Buller had been growing more and more tired of Warren, and not of Warren only, but of the whole Trichardt's Drift operations as such. Sitting at Spearman's he had thought out a new and much more ingenious plan of his own, and now the abandonment of Spion Kop had given him what he wanted, a reason not only for superseding Warren, but for making an entirely fresh start. Scarcely concealing his satisfaction at the turn of events, he brushed aside Warren's suggestions for the resumption of the week-long engagement, and announced his intention of withdrawing the force across the river. Giving back the Fifth Division to Warren, he resumed the full control of operations himself, and at 7 A.M. sent orders to Irvine to bring to Trichardt's the pontoons at Potgieter's, as well as those that had been sent down on the previous day to help the crossing of Lyttelton's battalions.

British and Boer losses on Jan. 24.

Thus tamely ended the great fight for the summit of Spion Kop. The day's casualties had been heavy, considering

* A party of four under Lieutenant Hamilton-Russell in consequence of this order climbed a considerable way up the hill about 7 A.M. till stopped by stretcher-bearers, who warned them they were on the point of running into the Boers.

the size of the force engaged. In all some 32 officers and about 290 men were killed or died of wounds, while 33 officers and about 530 men were wounded.* Lastly, there were nearly 300 men made prisoners by the Boers, some of them wounded. The losses fell most heavily on the regiments of the original attack. The two companies of Thorneycroft's Mounted Infantry lost 35 per cent. of their strength (55 per cent. of their officers); the Lancashire Fusiliers 30 per cent. (63 per cent. of officers); the Royal Lancasters 25 per cent., in each case exclusive of prisoners. The Middlesex, Imperial Light Infantry, Scottish Rifles and 60th each had nearly 100 casualties. As on Wagon Hill the newly-raised irregulars bore the brunt of the long day's fighting, and the more equal proportion of officers' casualties to those of their men among them are a witness to the excellent quality of their material. In this respect, indeed, the contrast between British and Boer methods was strikingly exemplified at Spion Kop. Out of a total of nearly 300 Boer casualties, there was only one officer, Field-Cornet Badenhorst of Vryheid (killed). Where many on both sides showed conspicuous courage the palm must go to the little band of Carolina men who first scaled the Aloe Knoll, and from there joined in more than one bold attempt to capture the eastern half of the summit. Their losses, 55 out of a total of 88, or 62 per cent., equal the best achievement of any corps on either side during the war, and the part they played that day was a splendid testimony alike to their valour and to the skill with which they had posted themselves.

Medical arrangements

As can be imagined, it had been very difficult to make adequate arrangements for the wounded. The volunteer stretcher-bearers, led by Lieutenant Stansfeld, showed conspicuous courage throughout the day, but it was impossible to get the majority of the wounded out of the trenches. Though Captain Tyacke, R.A.M.C., and other officers worked

* Inclusive of the losses of the 60th on the Twin Peaks. The total casualties of the fighting from January 16 to 24 were 36 officers and 338 men killed or died of wounds, 47 officers and 1,008 men wounded, and 4 officers and 307 men missing and prisoners. The Boer casualties for the same period were about 400.

unremittingly, the work was far more than the resources of the first dressing station on the summit could cope with, and a second larger dressing station, under Lieutenant Blake Knox, R.A.M.C., was established at the foot of the hill, where as many as possible were passed on to the field hospitals. At an early hour on the 25th Blake Knox and some other medical officers and stretcher-parties started for the summit. Arriving before dawn, they began collecting the wounded, and waking up and sending down the hill those who had overslept themselves, though many of these last must still have remained and been added to the prisoners taken in the fighting. A little later the Boers arrived and arrested them. Botha, however, let them go on with their work, and eventually, on the arrival at 10 A.M. of Colonel Allen, P.M.O., allowed most of the wounded to be taken away. The dead were buried on the hill in the trenches which they had defended.

Comparison of Spion Kop with Majuba.

There is one other engagement with which the historian of Spion Kop must always be tempted to make comparison. The frontal attack abandoned as fruitless; the sudden seizure by night of a lofty mountain dominating the Boer trenches; the hope, so nearly realized, that the mere occupation might drive the Boers away in panic; the prompt, bold counter-attack under the shelter of the steep slopes; the neglect of important tactical points, the ill-constructed trenches, the inferior shooting, the gallant general's death—feature after feature Spion Kop repeats the story of Majuba. Yet in the spirit of the two there is all the difference. Majuba was a venture, bold, perhaps even rash, but one for which the military situation furnished some justification. The occupation of the hill was a plan in itself because there were no men available with whom to do anything more. That the Boers would attempt, still less achieve, its recapture was never thought of; there was no precedent for it. But Spion Kop came after Majuba, and after Nicholson's Nek. It was the outcome, not of military necessities, but of an unmilitary compromise. It was fought with a whole army lying idly by and watching. Majuba was a misfortune; Spion Kop a well-deserved punishment.

Amid all the blundering, confusion and misunderstanding that make up the story of Spion Kop, certain general causes of failure stand out clearly. Of all these causes, the most deep-seated, as it is certainly the most disquieting, is the general feebleness, the palpable lack of will-power, exhibited in the direction of affairs on the British side. It is difficult to discern in the conduct of any one of the senior officers responsible for the general dispositions that day a trace of the fierce determination that means to win at all costs, of the restless eagerness that leaves no stone unturned to make victory certain, or even of that old-fashioned British obstinacy that refuses ever to acknowledge defeat. On the contrary, in instance after instance, on this as on the preceding days, we are struck by a half-heartedness, by a fear of bold decisions and wholesale commitments, by a reluctance to exercise responsibility, by an indifference to the value of time, or even an eagerness to find pretexts for wasting it, by a readiness to leave things to chance, by an acquiescence in failure, which are but the manifestations of a common cause, the lack of will. That lack of virile purpose, no doubt, underlay all the more specific and technical causes of failure. But it is distinguishable from them, and it is something far more significant, as the story of Spion Kop shows. For in the end, whatever specific causes contributed to bring about the situation at nightfall on the 24th, it was Botha's persistent will to conquer that decided the issue.

Lack of will-power on British side.

Of the more specific and secondary causes, the most obvious is, perhaps, the tactical inferiority of the British, from highest to lowest, compared with the Boers. The original tactical defects of the occupation of Spion Kop have already been discussed at length, and the course of the narrative has shown that, with the one exception of Lyttelton, not a single senior officer seems to have had any conception of actively helping the situation except by sending more reinforcements to a point where it ought to have been obvious from the first that the men could do least and would suffer most. Nor was it merely a case of the application of out-of-date tactics to unprecedented modern conditions. To occupy a position in the middle of the enemy's line with one-tenth of one's

Tactical deficiency of the British leaders.

force, and await results, was not good tactics even in the day of bows and arrows. Nothing in the British drill-books of the last generation would justify Spion Kop. It was not so much any positive faulty teaching in our army as the sheer absence of the living spirit of tactics, long deadened by routine, that caused the British leaders, in the midst of the distractions and anxieties of real war, to relapse into that aimless fatuity of which the series of operations which culminated in Spion Kop will always remain the most signal instance.

Of the British troops.

In the actual firing-line, indeed, the novel conditions of warfare seriously affected the tactical situation. Neither in skill with the rifle, nor in individual intelligence and initiative, nor in physical and moral endurance, was the British soldier equal to the terribly exacting demands of modern warfare. The constant reinforcement of the summit of Spion Kop only increased the overcrowding, added to the casualties, and contributed to the demoralization of a considerable part of the force. Yet, on the other hand, a smaller force of the same men would have been rushed off the summit by the Boers. Spion Kop might have been held against all comers by 500 men, but not by 500 ordinary British soldiers, nor by 5,000. Nevertheless, in face of an enemy so weak in numbers, so undisciplined, and so unorganized as the Boers, the tactical deficiencies of the British soldier need have proved no bar to victory in the hands of leaders capable of making the best of his many good qualities, and of compensating for his defects by bold strategy and skilful tactical handling.

Failure to realize importance of information.

The second cause of failure, prominent in many another instance but nowhere so conspicuous as here, was the inability to realize the importance of acquiring and communicating information. No effort was made beforehand to ascertain the shape of the position to be occupied, or to furnish the officers entrusted with its capture with such information. No sufficient effort was made by those officers themselves to discover the shape of the summit before intrenching. No attempt was subsequently made to enlighten Warren as to the tactical position on the hill either by those above or by Buller below. No message was sent to Coke to inform him

of Thorneycroft's appointment, or of Warren's change of headquarters. No message was sent to Thorneycroft to inform him that Coke was coming up, or that the 60th were attacking the Twin Peaks. Throughout the day Warren never once communicated to anyone on the summit what arrangements he was making for the next day. Nobody, in fact, made any real, determined effort to transmit information or to discover what was happening. Warren, on Three Tree Hill, and Thorneycroft, in the centre of the bullet-swept summit, were alike in their view that it was the business of others to inform them, not their business to find out. The Royal Artillery signalling station did, indeed, try to communicate the position of the Boer guns, but not that of the Boer riflemen on the crest or on the Aloe Knoll, though the latter might quite well have been subjected to a simultaneous cross-fire from Spearman's and Three Tree Hill, if anything like exact indications of distances had been furnished to the gunners. But the British gunners were never really informed where the Boers were, and when they did discover them for themselves and opened fire, as in the case of the naval guns firing on the Aloe Knoll, or of an occasion, later in the day, when the Three Tree Hill gunners discovered some Boers on the west slope of the hill, they were stopped by commanders afraid of the risk of having their own men shelled. The British gunners were not inferior to the Boer gunners, and, though their positions were not as good, they might have made up for that by far greater volume of fire. Only the Boer gunners were armed with knowledge, the one indispensable weapon of modern war. That was the whole difference.

Difficulty of its transmission.

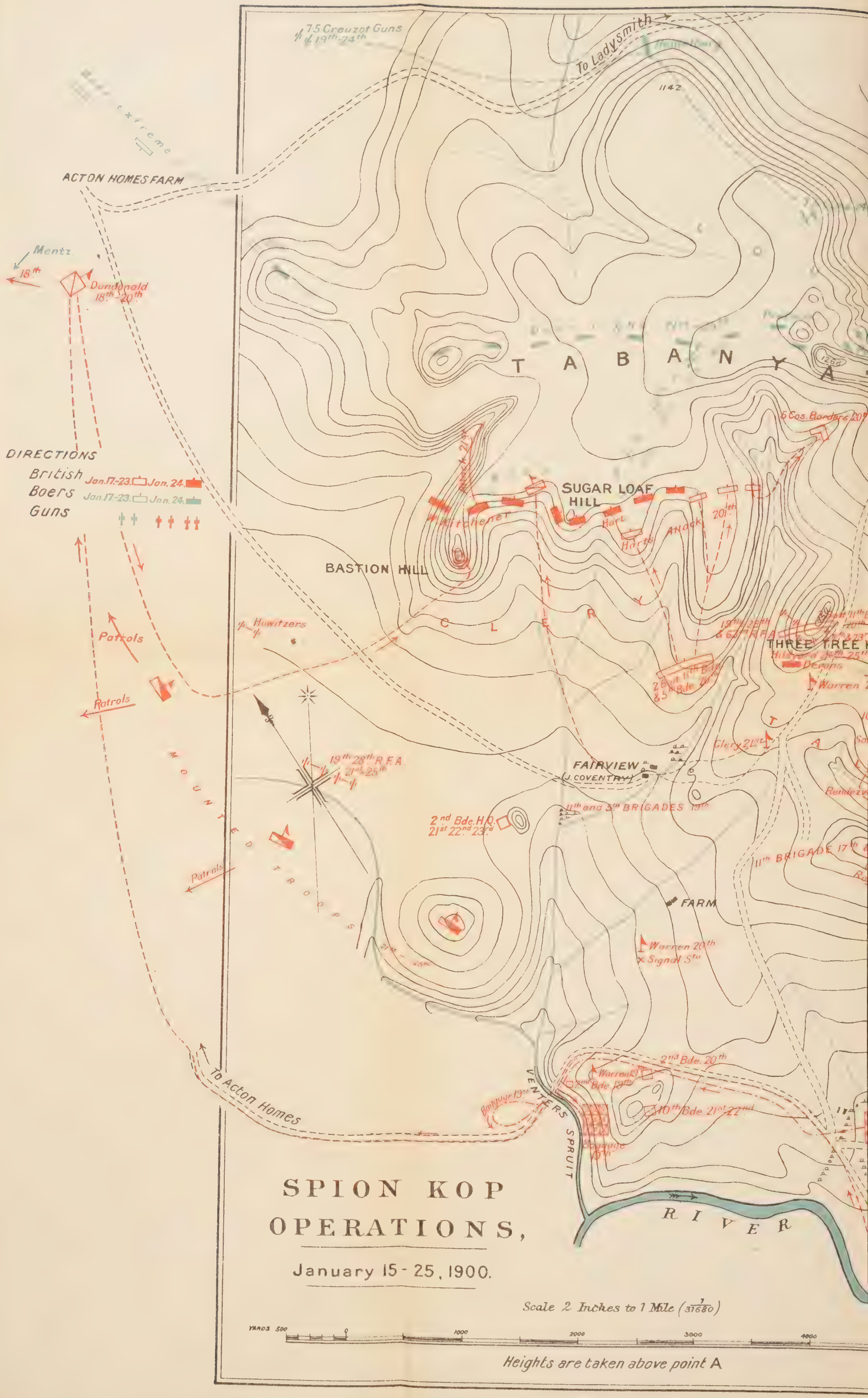
And if the all-importance of information was not realized, still less was the difficulty of securing its transmission. The systematic repetition of every message by several orderlies was not attempted, and, indeed, short as were the distances involved, messages by hand seem, in many cases, to have taken quite inordinate times to reach their destination. Under the heavy fire on Spion Kop signalling, by heliograph or flag, was dangerous and slow. Receiving signals on the summit was easier, but the real difficulty, in that case, only

began when the message was received. To reach the firing-line, even by crawling, was a matter of imminent peril. Nor was it easy for the hapless messenger, bewildered and unnerved by his own danger, to discover the intended recipient among the khaki figures lying flat as soles behind every stone. The abandonment of swords, badges, and all other marks of rank, in order to avoid drawing the Boer fire on officers, contributed to the confusion, and helps to explain how it was that on that day no one ever found anybody else on the summit. The question of communication will be one of the most important in the warfare of the future.*

Buller's disorganization of the army.

A cause even more directly responsible for the failure of Spion Kop was the complete disorganization of the Natal Army by Buller, which reached its height on the 24th. By practically withdrawing himself and his staff from the operations, Buller pulled out the keystone of the whole military framework, and dislocated it from top to bottom. Warren, Coke, Hill, were each doing work for which they were not intended or prepared, and each with an inadequate, untrained, and makeshift staff. They may none of them have risen to the test, but the test was not a fair one. And if Buller would not command himself neither would he let any one else command. Warren, with all the responsibility of four-fifths of the force on his shoulders, was still in many ways only in the position of the commander of a flank detachment. The long-range guns, the balloon, the central position were all retained

* There can be no doubt that to fit an army for the real conditions of war all ranks ought to be specially trained in the passing along of messages. Telephones will have to be freely used in the battlefield—indeed, there is no reason why a telegraph line should not have been taken up Spion Kop on the morning of the 24th—and before long science may provide a really portable form of wireless telephony. Officers' uniforms must be made as distinctive as possible, not by badges, but by actual difference in the pattern of the cloth. It is perfectly easy to devise a pattern which would look exactly like khaki at 200 yards, and yet be unmistakable at shorter distances. It might even be of the gaudiest colours as long as those colours were in sufficiently narrow stripes. Again the soldier, normally as invisible as possible, should have it in his power to make himself easily recognizable at a distance, especially in order to help his own guns. The provision to every soldier of a large coloured handkerchief, which could be waved to mark the position of troops, would be a most serviceable measure.



SPION KOP
OPERATIONS,
January 15 - 25, 1900.
Scale 2 Inches to 1 Mile (1/31680)
YARDS 500 0 1000 2000 3000 4000
Heights are taken above point A
ACTON HOMES FARM
Mentz
18th
Dundonald 18th-20th
DIRECTIONS
British Boers Guns
Jan. 17-23. Jan. 24.
Jan. 17-23. Jan. 24.
Patrols
Patrols
Patrols
MOUNTED TROOPS
To Acton Homes
To Ladysmith
7.5 Creuzot Guns 19th-24th
1142
TABANYA
SUGAR LOAF HILL
BASTION HILL
Hart
Harts Attack 20th
Whitchener
Hawitzers
CLERY
THREE TREE
Devons
Warren
Clery 21st
FAIRVIEW (J. COVENTRY)
19th 28th R.F.A. 21st-25th
2nd Bde. H.Q. 21st 22nd 23rd
11th and 5th BRIGADES 19th
11th BRIGADE 17th
FARM
Warren 20th
Signal Sta
2nd Bde. 20th
Warren 19th
2nd Bde 19th
10th Bde 21st 22nd
Baggage 19th
VENTERS SPRUIT
RIVER
5 Cos. Borders 20th

To Ladysmith 15 miles →

Blaauw Bank Spruit

To Ladysmith 13 miles →

SOL DE JAGER

ROSALIE

GROOTE HOEK

BRAKFONTEIN

630

490

Burgh
Carolina
Rustenburg
Heidelberg

GREEN HILL

TWIN PEAKS

S P I O N K O P

Connaughts

2 Cd Somersets

Cameron

Cornwalls

Lancs.

Coke 24th

2 Cd Connaughts

2.30 pm

Scottish Rifles & B.M.I.

K.R.R. 1pm 24th

K.R.R.

K.R.R.

19th 20th D.L.I.

K.R.R.

4th R.F.A.

D.L.I. 17th 18th

S.R. 24th

Lyttelton 17th 18th

MACONOCHIE

KOPJES

K.R.R. 17th 21st

Howitzer's & Naval 12 pdrs.

B.M.I. 17th

Pont 22nd

POTGIETER'S DRIFT

Naval 12 pdrs

S.R. 24th 1 p.m.

Woodgate night 23rd

Bde morning 24th

B O E R

5th BRIGADE 17th & 18th

WRIGHT'S FARM

Baggage 18th

2nd Bde 18th

TRICHARDT'S DRIFT

T U G E L A

18th

2nd Bde 17th

TRICHARDT'S FARM

Warren 17th

Dundonald 17th

Baggage 17th

5000 YARDS

To Springfield 8 miles

EMMADALE

K.R.R. 23rd

MOUNT ALICE

1000

Naval 4·7 guns

NAVAL GUN HILL

Buller's H.Q. Jan. 12-Feb. 4.

S P E A R M A N ' S

K.R.R. 22nd

To Springfield

K.R.R. 24th

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London

by Buller. The first two Warren did at last bring himself to the point of asking for when it was too late. The last Warren never dreamt of occupying, and he conducted the whole Spion Kop operation from the one quarter from which the tactical features of the struggle were least visible. And, what was even more mischievous, Buller retained to himself the right of occasional spasmodic interference. On the 22nd that interference led Warren to adopt a plan which was neither his own nor Buller's. On the 23rd it not only caused the tired-out battalions of the 11th Brigade to be substituted for the untouched 10th Brigade, but added to the confusion when subsequently reinforcements from the 10th Brigade were sent up the hill. On the 24th, in the case of Thorneycroft's appointment, it was more excusable. But it cannot be said to have done good at any time, for the best work done by Thorneycroft was the work in the firing-line which he would have done in any case. And it proved fatal in the result. Equally fatal was Buller's last act of interference, the pressure he put upon Lyttelton to withdraw his men from the Twin Peaks. Positively and negatively, alike by what he did, and by what he neglected to do, Buller was the principal cause of the failure of Spion Kop.

Buller a national type.

But even here criticism, to be just, must look behind persons to more general causes. Buller was but the embodiment of the qualities and defects which the British military system tended to produce. It is as a type that he will live in history, and it is, perhaps, for that very reason that in good and evil fortune alike he retained the affection and confidence of his men. Circumstances but served in his case to bring into exceptional prominence defects that, in a greater or less degree, were inherent in almost every officer in the British Army. The neglect of all but the formal elements of strategy and tactics, the incapacity to realize the value of knowledge, the disregard of the difficult problems involved in scientific organization, the shrinking from whole-hearted decisions, the flinching from necessary sacrifices, in other words, the whole refusal to believe in the deadly seriousness of war, what were they but the normal intellectual and moral atmosphere in which the British Army—and, indeed, the whole

British nation—had long lived? Given that atmosphere, given the organization of the British Army, given the facilities for training which it enjoyed, and hesitation, confusion and failure were but the normal results to be expected when a British general attempted to handle a force of any size in the presence of an enemy. Spion Kop was lost not by Buller, or Warren, or Thorneycroft, but by Aldershot and Pall Mall, by the House of Commons and by the nation.

Jan. 26–27. The withdrawal.

By nightfall on the 25th Irvine had a new bridge constructed near the existing one, and all day on the 26th and till 2.30 A.M. on the 27th the transport was engaged in crossing. Late on the evening of the 26th the troops were withdrawn, in inky darkness and drenching rain, unmolested, except for a short outbreak of fire about 10 P.M. from the Boers on Tabanyama, who, hearing noises, may have feared a night attack. By 7 A.M. the bridges had been taken to pieces, and by 10 A.M. the troops were in camp behind Trichardt's Farm. Though Buller at the time claimed some credit for having brought the troops back without the loss of "a pound of stores," the actual work of this well-managed retirement was done by Warren and his staff. The Boers, exhausted by their efforts and contented with their signal success, made no attempt to molest their retreating foe. On the 29th Warren's division was moved back almost to Springfield, and Clery's out of range of the left bank. Lyttelton alone maintained his position on Maconochie Kopjes. The whole force was given complete rest and extra rations.

CHAPTER XI

VAAL KRANTZ

When, on the morning of January 25, Buller resumed direct command over the troops on the left bank of the Tugela, there was no overmastering reason why he should not have continued Warren's operations from the point which they had reached. He might have ordered the reoccupation of Spion Kop; he might have carried out his own plan for working round the Boer right beyond Bastion Hill, which he had vainly urged upon Warren on the 22nd; he might even have adopted Warren's plan, and made a direct assault on the Tabanyama trenches, reckoning on the exhaustion and demoralization of the Boers at the end of so many days' fighting. But Buller had become thoroughly weary of the operations on that flank. To withdraw and make a fresh start seemed so much easier and more satisfactory, and would give time to rest and reorganize the troops without fear of molestation. The plan for this fresh start he had already been carrying about in his head for some days.

Buller's reasons for withdrawal

The extreme left, as far as he could make out, of the Boer position rested on the little flat-topped hill called Vaal Krantz, thrown forward in front of Brakfontein to within 3,500 yards of Swaartz Kop, which completely dominated it from the right bank of the Tugela. East of Vaal Krantz, between it and the underfeatures of Doorn Kop, was a narrow strip of almost level ground, through which the road from Schiet Drift led straight on to the Ladysmith plain. To seize Vaal Krantz under cover of artillery on Swartz Kop, to push through the open defile, sending cavalry round to harry the rear of Brakfontein and mounting guns on

The Vaal Krantz plan.

Vaal Krantz to enfilade the Boer trenches, and thus to roll up the whole position—such was the plan that now commended itself to Buller's judgment. It was an excellent plan in many respects, though no longer so excellent as it would have been if carried out when Buller first arrived at Spearman's. Strategically it was an attempt to pierce the series of Boer positions along the Tugela at what was undoubtedly a weak point. Tactically, it was a flank attack upon the enemy's line under the most favourable conditions as regards artillery, and offering excellent opportunities for cavalry and infantry advance, and for secondary artillery positions as soon as the first point of attack had been gained. But it was only a flank attack as long as the Boer flank remained where it was. Should the Boers become aware of the movement in time, and occupy in strength the head of the defile, Doorn Kloof, and the slopes of Doorn Kop, it would become a mere attempt to force a way, by a frontal attack, through a pass commanded by the enemy on both sides. Rapidity and surprise were therefore conditions indispensable to the success of Buller's plan.

Effect of Spion Kop on world outside.

But before passing on to the execution of Buller's new plan it will be necessary to consider certain other results that followed from his abandonment of the positions gained up to the 24th. It must be remembered that to the world outside—to White in Ladysmith, to Roberts at Cape Town, to the War Office and public in England—Buller's brief telegrams during the past week had given all the impression of slow but continuous progress, culminating in the capture of the key to the whole position. His subsequent messages announcing the loss of Spion Kop, and the retreat across the Tugela, seemed to imply the necessity of that retreat, and therefore a far more serious check than he had really received. The revulsion of feeling was consequently all the greater, and it is in the light of this that we must read the various communications that passed to and fro between London, Cape Town, Spearman's Camp and Ladysmith, during the next few days.*

* For full text of most of these messages see evidence of Sir G. White, Sir R. Buller, and Lord Roberts before the War Commission.

At midday on the 25th Buller telegraphed briefly to Roberts to say that he had found that "Warren's garrison" had abandoned Spion Kop; that he had gone over and assumed command, and was withdrawing to Potgieter's; that he intended to have one more try at Ladysmith, but feared that a great portion of "Warren's force" was not in good spirits, and that there were "mutual recriminations"; that he blamed himself most for not having interfered before. Beyond carefully dissociating Buller from the conduct of the unsuccessful operations, and suggesting Warren's incapacity to command,* the message conveyed very little precise information. At the same time Buller sent the news to White, and announced his intention of having another "fair square try" to get through to him, but expressed the fear that his force was not strong enough. The first message reached Cape Town on the 26th. Up to this Roberts had made no attempt to interfere with Buller's operations beyond giving a few words of sound, but unheeded, advice on the 16th. He now felt it necessary to express his views more distinctly, and advised Buller, unless he felt "fairly confident" of success to keep a bold front, but to postpone his attempt till the situation in Natal should be eased by his own invasion of the Free State, which he then hoped would take place about February 5. While expressing great concern at Buller's suggestion of strained relations between Warren and his subordinates, Roberts's message gave no indication of letting a defeat on the Tugela in any way affect his plan of

Buller's first messages to Roberts and White.

* This suggestion was translated into more definite language in Buller's covering note of January 30 on Warren's report of Spion Kop: "We had really lost our chance by Sir C. Warren's slowness. He seems to me a man who can do well what he can do himself, but who cannot command, as he can use neither his staff nor his subordinates. I can never employ him on an independent command again" (Spion Kop Despatches, Cd. 968, p. 17). The elimination of this and other criticisms in the first despatches, published in April, 1900, led to much controversy in Parliament and elsewhere, with the result that the full text was eventually published in April, 1902. The last stage of the controversy was a correspondence in February and March, 1902, between Sir R. Buller and Mr. Balfour, in which the former strenuously denied that he was in command of the Spion Kop operations, even going so far as to assert repeatedly that he had not been present at them or witnessed them!

campaign, though, as the next chapter will show, the news of Spion Kop undoubtedly was a factor in confirming his decision with regard to the exact form that plan was to take. He at the same time expressed his views more fully in a sympathetic and friendly letter which reached Buller on February 4. White, as was only natural, was much more seriously perturbed. Receiving Buller's message on the 27th he at once replied (55 P), urging Buller to get another division to make sure of success, as Ladysmith was doomed if he tried and failed again. He could feed his men, but not his horses, for another month, and his mortality had risen to eight or ten daily. As a last resort he asked if he should not abandon Ladysmith, and attempt to join hands with Buller with the 7,000 men and 36 guns he still reckoned himself able to put into the field.

Wild suggestions from the War Office.

This same suggestion of a desperate sortie had already been anticipated in London, where the depression caused by the Spion Kop failure was greatest of all. With the sanction of the Government Lord Wolseley cabled on the 26th to Buller suggesting that if he had any doubt about his next attempt to relieve Ladysmith, White had better try to break out at night. Roberts, to whom the message was repeated, at once telegraphed to Buller pointing out the desperate nature of the undertaking and the loss of prestige involved. He hoped himself before the end of February to be near Bloemfontein, having meanwhile relieved Kimberley. White had, indeed, on January 16 mentioned February 15 as the date to which he could maintain himself, but if he could hold on till the end of the month the pressure in Natal would meanwhile be sufficiently relieved to enable Buller to get through. Buller rightly judged the proposal to be impracticable, and in deference to his and Roberts's views the War Office withdrew their suggestion. The next suggestion of the War Office was to ask if there was any defensive position south of Ladysmith that could be made practically impregnable with 10,000 men, with the view apparently of leaving Ladysmith to itself, and concentrating every effort on Roberts's invasion of the Free State. To this Buller replied that at least 16,000 were necessary, but that he wholly disapproved

of the policy indicated, and this second suggestion was thus also fortunately disposed of.

Buller's and Roberts's messages to White.

On the morning of the 28th Buller sent another message (No. 173) to White with further details about Spion Kop, and informed him that he could certainly take the Potgieter's position, but that if the enemy stayed on his flank at Spion Kop he might find it impossible to deal with a further position at Roodepoort, half way to Ladysmith, which he believed the Boers had strongly intrenched.* On receipt of White's 55 P Buller advised White to wait the result of his next effort before having recourse to the desperate step proposed. He concluded by the following summary and criticism of Roberts's message of the 27th:—

"Roberts says . . . that if you will wait till the end of February he will by then be in Bloemfontein and will have relieved Kimberley, which will, he says, reduce the pressure on Ladysmith. I doubt Roberts's forecasts coming off and think I had better play my hand alone. What do you think?"

White's reply (56 P) was that by sacrificing many of his horses he could hold out for six weeks, and that he believed Roberts's advance would at all events draw off the Free Staters. He urged Buller to stick to steady bombardment, which his information led him to believe was discouraging to the Boers, and to slow "sap work" progress, rather than to commit himself to "another definite attack." In any case he trusted to Buller's preventing the Boers from leaving the Tugela for Ladysmith—according to him a matter of ninety minutes—and throwing their strength upon him. That same morning Roberts sent a message to White, opening with a passage of "warmest congratulation upon the heroic splendid defence" of Ladysmith, expressing his "deepest regret" that the necessities of the campaign should cause the relief to be delayed, the sick and wounded to suffer, and his confident hope that he would succeed before the end of February in materially reducing the enemy's strength in Natal. With

* This same fear of being held up by a second position in the plain after forcing the Tugela positions appears in a message sent to the War Office on the previous day.

its wise touch of flattery, its note of sympathy, and ring of quiet confidence, Roberts's message was something very different from Buller's bald summary of his views. It greatly cheered White, who at once asked leave to encourage his force by informing them of the intended operation, a request granted as soon as the operation actually began.

Buller's reasons for renewing the attack. Its postponement to Feb. 5.

On the same day Roberts asked Buller for an exact statement of his plan and for the date on which he intended to start, and again urged him, unless he considered he had a "reasonable prospect" of success, to remain on the defensive till his own operations should produce their effect. Buller replied (No. 178) that he hoped to attack on the 31st at 4 P.M., that delay was objectionable owing to the death-rate in Ladysmith, that he felt fairly confident of success, as the enemy were disheartened after Spion Kop, and finally that he could promise that he would in no case compromise his force. As to his plan he only vaguely mentioned that it depended on a newly-discovered drift which would enable him to reach a position hitherto considered inaccessible. On the 31st Buller telegraphed that, owing to bad weather and the non-arrival of a horse artillery battery from India, he had postponed the date of his advance. Roberts expressed his satisfaction, more especially as he now found it necessary to postpone his own move to February 9. On February 2, however, Buller received a message from White saying that from information received in Ladysmith he believed another serious attack was imminent. Buller replied that he would be ready to move by the 5th and asked if White expected an attack before then, to which he received an answer in the negative. Curiously enough, that same day Buller received a warning from the War Office that information had reached them that Ladysmith would be attacked on the 5th. On the 3rd Buller telegraphed to White that he hoped to be "on the flats" before nightfall on the 5th, and on the 4th, having received Roberts's letter, he replied that Ladysmith was in a bad way, that he feared White was less confident than he affected to be, and that the only thing was for him to "peg away." He did not think the move into the Free State would help Natal. The only help Roberts could really give him

was another division, and that, he admitted, could not be spared. Buller was no doubt right in "pegging away," and indeed Roberts himself in his letter had urged him not to withdraw from the line of the Tugela and so relax the strain upon the enemy. Whether the actual situation was serious enough to justify Buller in disregarding his chief's express desire for simultaneous action and in precipitating what, in intention at least, was a general attack, is very doubtful.

Arrival of reinforcements. Preparations for Vaal Krantz.

Of the success of his plan Buller seems to have been very sanguine, and in an address to some of the troops at church parade on January 28 he informed them that he had now really got the key to Ladysmith, and that they should be there within a week. Meanwhile the force rested at Potgieter's and received useful reinforcements in the shape of "A" Battery, R.H.A. (the only horse artillery unit in Natal), two 5-inch guns, two squadrons of 14th Hussars, and considerable drafts for many of the infantry battalions, more than making up for recent losses. The regular cavalry (13th, 14th and Royals) were now brigaded under Burn-Murdoch of the Royals as the 1st Cavalry Brigade, Dundonald retaining the rest of the mounted troops, now called the 2nd Cavalry Brigade. Colonel Wynne, the chief of the staff, was given the command of Woodgate's brigade, and was succeeded by Colonel Miles, a matter of no particular import in view of Buller's attitude towards his staff and staff work in general. The preparations for the attack on Vaal Krantz were also pushed on. A road and gun-slide were constructed on the southern side of Swaartz Kop, and by the indefatigable exertions of the Naval Brigade and Scots Fusiliers six naval 12-pounders, two guns of the 64th Battery, and No. 4 Mountain Battery were dragged on to the flat summit, their positions being carefully screened behind the bushes till the time came for them to open fire. The two 5-inch guns were posted on a low spur at the western end of the hill. A pontoon bridge, known as No. 2, was constructed in front of Swaartz Kop, nearly two miles below No. 1 bridge at Potgieter's. Pontoons for a third bridge, to be thrown over the river east of Swaartz Kop, were moved down in readiness for the attack on Vaal Krantz,

as the scouts reported Munger's Drift, just below the hill, to be difficult and rather dangerous. On February 3 Lyttelton's brigade were all withdrawn to the foot of Spearman's Hill and their place taken by Wynne's brigade, accompanied by the 2nd and 5th Brigade Divisions of artillery and the 61st (Howitzer) Battery.

The Boers after Spion Kop. All the leaders take a holiday. Viljoen's alarms.

After Spion Kop the Boers gave themselves over to the repose which, according to their views, was the best fruit of victory. Many of the burghers went back to their camps round Ladysmith or to their homes. Both Schalk Burger and A. P. Cronje felt unwell and in need of a change, and even Botha thought himself justified in taking his deferred holiday, and went off to Pretoria, where, no doubt, he also made use of the opportunity of laying his military views before the President, and strengthening his own position in case of eventualities. During the Spion Kop operations the subdivision of the command under at least three generals had proved a source of weakness and confusion, to some extent compensated by Botha's energy and personal influence. But now the cohesion of the Boer forces on the Upper Tugela was almost wholly broken up, and each little section of the defence was practically left to its own devices. That the British would renew their attack was certain, and the preparations for dragging guns up Swaartz Kop, which were at once discovered, clearly indicated its direction. But no corresponding rearrangement of the commandos was made, for there was no one in authority to overcome the disinclination of individual commandants or field-cornets to move their men from safe positions. Ben Viljoen, who with some 800 Johannesburg, Fordsburg, Jeppestown and Standerton burghers commanded on the extreme left from Krantz Kloof, a gully running into Brakfontein, round to Vaal Krantz, clearly saw that the next blow would fall upon him, and tried, but in vain, to get his colleagues to reinforce him. An appeal to Joubert proved equally useless, for, in complete ignorance of the real situation, Joubert only concluded that Viljoen was nervous. His answer to Viljoen's appeal was to request Lukas Meyer to ride over from Colenso and strengthen Viljoen's faith! However, on Meyer's recom-

mendation, Joubert ordered the "Long Tom" on Telegraph Hill to be sent off to the Tugela on February 3 with a view to mounting it on Doorn Kop, whence it could enfilade the British guns on Swaartz Kop.

Steyn urges unification of command on Tugela. Kruger tries to induce Joubert to go there.

Meanwhile, President Steyn, who had returned to Bloemfontein after his visit to the Ladysmith laagers, had become seriously alarmed at the lack of organization in the allied forces in Natal, each of which had a commander-in-chief at Ladysmith, while the Tugela operations were practically left to themselves. Accordingly, on the 4th, he sent the following telegram to Kruger:—

"Both our generals are at Ladysmith. The consequence is, too many heads at the Tugela, which can only cause confusion there. Some generals are sitting in safe positions with plenty of men and refuse to send reinforcements to the probable point of attack. Would it not be advisable to give General Prinsloo the chief command over all the burghers on the Tugela, so that he can on his own responsibility dispose them as he thinks best? The matter is urgent, and had best be settled at once as an attack is expected any moment."

Kruger realized the importance of the question, but did not quite see why the chief command at what was now the main theatre of operations should be in Free State hands and thus out of his control. Forwarding Steyn's telegram to Joubert he urged Joubert to go to the Tugela himself:—

"I shall be very pleased, if your health allows, if you will go and take the command there, and arrange that there are not too many burghers in one place or too few in another. You can see for yourself that the danger is at the Tugela. If it is impossible for you to go, which I trust is not the case, would General Prinsloo of the O.F.S. be willing to go if you asked him?"

Joubert's weak health or his disinclination to active exertion prevailed against Kruger's sounder judgment, and Prinsloo went down to the Tugela on the 5th. He was too late to make preparations to meet the blow that had already fallen, and does not seem ever to have exerted an effective authority. Before this Joubert had telegraphed to Botha to

return, which he accordingly did, leaving Pretoria on the night of the 4th. But how little the gravity of the situation was realized by Joubert may be judged from the fact that, as a result of previous urgent appeals from Steyn, some 750 Heidelbergers were on the 4th sent off from Ladysmith to Colesberg—a fact which also incidentally shows the improbability of the rumours with regard to a renewed attempt to take Ladysmith by force.

Boer strength and dispositions.

The only reinforcement, besides the gun, sent to the Upper Tugela before the 5th consisted of some 350 Heidelbergers, who camped in Doorn Kloof, available to cover Viljoen's left, while it is probable that the patrols which extended beyond Viljoen's left along the slopes of Doorn Kop to Schiet Drift were somewhat strengthened. The total strength of the Boers on the Upper Tugela was now probably not over 4,000 men. Tabanyama was held by Commandant Steenkamp of Heilbron; Spion Kop by Field-Cornet Breytenbach of Ermelo; the Twin Peaks by Rustenburg, Vryheid, Carolina, Lydenburg, and a small German contingent as guard to the guns (three Krupp 7·5-cm., two Krupp howitzers and one pom-pom) which were posted along the heights descending from the Peaks to Brakfontein. From the Twin Peaks to Krantz Kloof the main position was held by Ermelo, Senekal, Vrede, Frankfort and Zoutpansberg in the order named, the Transvaalers under Tobias Smuts of Ermelo, the Free Staters under various commandants. East of Krantz Kloof Viljoen had now, in all, at the most 1,200 men. Two Creuzot 7·5-cm. and two pom-poms were at Krantz Kloof.

Feb. 3. Buller issues orders for the attack on the 5th.

Meanwhile on the afternoon of the 3rd Buller assembled his commanding officers and unfolded his plan. The following orders were then issued for the attack on the 5th:—

"1. It is the intention of the General Commanding to attack the extreme left of the enemy's positions and to endeavour to take the hill Vaal Krantz.

"2. The attempt will commence by a demonstration against the Brakfontein position. This will be carried out by the two Brigade Divisions R.F.A. and the 61st Battery, covered by the 11th Brigade 5th Division.

"3. During this demonstration the 4th Brigade, supported by the 2nd Division, the whole under the command of General Clery, will be formed in a suitable position E. of No. 2 Pontoon Bridge, the general idea being to cause the enemy to think that these troops are about to move from east to west across the bridge. The four guns 64th Battery are placed under General Clery's orders.

"4. After a certain bombardment sufficient to cause the enemy to enter their trenches, the left Battery of the Field Artillery will limber up and retire by No. 2 Pontoon Bridge to its new position, covering the throwing of the Pontoon Bridge No. 3 at Munger's Drift.

"Simultaneously with this movement the 4th Brigade will move out to cover the movement, and the battery of 14 guns on Swaartz Kop and the two 5-inch guns under it will open on Vaal Krantz and bombard the few trenches there.

"5. As soon as the Pontoon No. 3 is completed the rest of the six batteries will follow each other, passing from left to right at ten minutes' interval, the whole taking up positions to support the attack at Vaal Krantz, under the orders of Colonel Parsons, R.A., who will report to General Clery.

"6. After a sufficient bombardment the 4th Brigade, supported by the 2nd Division, will, under General Clery's orders, attack Vaal Krantz.

"7. As soon as the hill is occupied the artillery will ascend it and shell the trenches on Brakfontein, doing all they can to enfilade any that admit of it. Colonel Parsons will arrange that two batteries always watch the hills on the right.

"8. The 1st Brigade Cavalry will, when feasible, pass Vaal Krantz, and getting into the plain bring the Battery R.H.A. into action on any convenient target.

"9. The 2nd Brigade Cavalry will watch the right and rear throughout the operations.

"13. The G.O.C. 10th Brigade will be responsible for the camp at Spearman's Hill and the kopjes at Potgieter's."

Other paragraphs gave instructions for the guns, signallers and balloon. Warren was to superintend the duties specified in paragraphs 2 and 13, while Clery was to be responsible for the actual attack. Buller's station was to be near the 5-inch guns. The exact form the support of the Second

Division was to take was not specified in the orders, but it was subsequently arranged that Hildyard's brigade should cross with Lyttelton's and, moving over to the right, occupy the low underfeature of Doorn Kop called Green Hill, which separated Doorn Kloof from the defile through which Buller meant to force his way on to the Ladysmith plain. This was a precaution essential to the success of the plan, and its omission from such very detailed orders is a curious feature.

Criticism of the orders.

The general idea of Buller's plan was sound enough, and the conception of a feint to cover the throwing of the pontoon and the surprise of Vaal Krantz was a useful complement to it. But the way in which it was worked out in the orders was unnecessarily complicated in detail, though no doubt ingenious; it was seriously defective in the points that really mattered. The elaborate scheme for the successive withdrawal of the batteries from the feint to the real attack necessarily involved the termination of the feint before the real attack began, and the palpable giving away of the whole plan to the Boers. It would have been far simpler and better to have assigned only three or four batteries to the feint attack, and to have relied on the rest and the guns on Swartz Kop for the crossing and assault of Vaal Krantz. Then subsequently the batteries of the feint attack might simply have turned to the right without recrossing the river. From there they could have enfiladed the northern end of Vaal Krantz and have been in a much better position to support the subsequent attempt to roll up the whole of the Brakfontein trenches. But the idea of utilizing the troops of the feint attack to co-operate in the development of the general scheme never entered into Buller's calculations. It is quite clear from what actually happened, and from Buller's own subsequent comment in his despatch, that the demonstration was not intended to be anything more than one of those innocuous parades at extreme rifle-range which by Aldershot conventions passed for feint attacks. In striking contrast with the elaborate instructions for the feint was the meagreness of the orders referring to the really important part of the action, the pushing through of cavalry, infantry and guns after Vaal

Krantz was taken. The larger, and most effective, of the two mounted brigades was simply left to look after the flanks and rear,* which, as in the case of the 10th Brigade left at Spearman's, merely meant that Buller did not know what to do with it. The obviously right course would have been to send all the mounted troops round by Schiet Drift, only three miles from Vaal Krantz, Burn-Murdoch's brigade to gallop through the defile as soon as Vaal Krantz was captured, and Dundonald's to cover their right by pushing forward along the rough ground and over the summit of Doorn Kop. In any case, apart from the defects mentioned, the programme for the 5th was a very long one. It could only be carried out properly on one condition: that it should be started very early in the day, and that not a moment should be wasted during its execution.

Feb. 5. Late start of feint attack. Pontoon bridge completed 11.15 A.M.

During the 4th the Second Division moved down into the valley and bivouacked west of Swaartz Kop near the 4th Brigade. The day passed quietly, and the troops, cheered by Buller's confident assurances, sat round their camp fires singing or discussing the hoped-for victory till far into the night. There was no early start. It was not till after 6 A.M. on the 5th, at least three hours too late, that Wynne's brigade began slowly moving out from the Maconochie Kopjes, the York and Lancasters and South Lancashires leading, and the Royal Lancasters in support. The batteries followed, and opened soon after 7 A.M. The two naval 12-pounders on Gun Plateau and the two 4·7's on Mount Alice and Signal Hill joined in at 7.15. A little later the 4th Brigade, followed by the pontoon troops, four guns of the 64th Battery and the whole Second Division, marched off from their bivouacs to the flat ground north of Swaartz Kop in readiness for the real attack. Meanwhile the demonstration proceeded very slowly, the Boers making no reply. At 9.15 A.M. Buller personally ordered his C.R.A., Colonel Nutt,

* The special orders issued to Lord Dundonald on the night of the 4th did indeed mention that it would be of assistance if in the course of so doing he managed to secure the crests of Doorn Kop or operate in the plain, but as he was specially enjoined not to involve himself in serious conflict this amounted to very little.

to open fire with the Swaartz Kop guns and the two 5-inch guns on Vaal Krantz and on any broken ground that looked as if it might conceal Boers—the latter a pure waste of ammunition—and sent orders to the field batteries to open a brisker cannonade on Brakfontein. It was not till 9.30 that the 63rd Battery was withdrawn from the feint and sent round to help covering the construction of the pontoon. Escorted by the Scottish Rifles the pontoon wagons now moved down to the river (10.15 A.M.) and met with a not very heavy long-range fire from riflemen on the far side and from a Maxim posted on a small hill near Schiet Drift. The Engineers immediately launched the pontoons, and, working away most gallantly, completed a bridge seventy yards long in fifty minutes with a loss of only eight men wounded (11.15 A.M.). Irvine at once signalled the completion of his work, and twenty minutes later, as no troops had begun to cross, rode over to where Buller and Clery were sitting and reported progress.

12-2 P.M. Withdrawal of batteries and infantry of feint attack.

The ease with which the bridge had been built showed that the Boers had been completely surprised and had too few men on the spot to resist a crossing. Late in the day though it was, it was not too late for success. Lyttelton's men should have been sent over at once, some of the batteries of the feint attack immediately withdrawn, and the rest of the feint attack pushed closer to give it some semblance of a real operation. But Buller—who, as at Colenso, had by now completely taken over the conduct of the operation from Clery—had no intention of deviating from the set programme. So while the Boers, at last discovering where the real attack would be delivered, were hurrying round to meet it, Buller took no step, beyond sending orders to the batteries to begin withdrawing at ten-minute intervals and come across to the bombardment of Vaal Krantz. It was only quite shortly before this (11.40 A.M.) that the Boers had at last deigned to take notice of the demonstration, and had opened with two guns and a pom-pom from the Twin Peaks on the long line of batteries temptingly stretched across the plain. The batteries in vain turned upon them. The range, over 5,000 yards, and the elevation, nearly 1,000 feet, were too

much for them. The naval 4·7 guns had the range, but the Boer epaulements had been so skilfully cut into the northern slope of the mountain as to be completely covered from the direction of Spearman's. At 12.30 P.M. the order for withdrawal reached the batteries, and at the prescribed intervals they began to limber up and trot back to No. 2 pontoon, the 28th first, then the 19th and 73rd, and lastly the 78th. The Boer gunners redoubled their efforts upon their steadily narrowing target. There were moments when the British guns seemed almost blotted from view by the smoke and dust of the shells. But the fire from so few guns could not really be heavy, and only the 78th had any serious difficulty in limbering up. The 7th Battery on the extreme right was kept back by Colonel Parsons to cover the retirement of the infantry, which began soon after 1 P.M. The British troops had never got within 2,000 yards of the trenches, and the Boer riflemen had accordingly up to this not wasted their ammunition upon them. The Boers now sprang to their feet and blazed away, more for their own satisfaction than in the hope of inflicting much loss on the widely-extended lines. By 2 P.M. the whole demonstration was over. The losses were insignificant. Two officers, including Colonel Montgomery, commanding the 5th Brigade Division, and 8 men of the artillery, and 24 infantrymen were wounded, and one man killed. As a "set-piece" carried out with the same perfect precision and steadiness under a moderately heavy artillery fire as on an Aldershot field-day, this demonstration was a great success. It provided a magnificent spectacle to the rest of the army, and reflected credit on the previous company and battery drill of the troops engaged in it. As a military operation it was ludicrous.

2 P.M. Buller lets Lyttelton begin the attack.

An hour, two hours, and more had now passed since the bridge was completed. Battery after battery had added its quota to the hail of shrapnel which poured down upon the few stony acres of Vaal Krantz. But still Buller hesitated. It was not till 2 P.M. that he reluctantly gave Lyttelton permission to start. The Durham Light Infantry moved down to the pontoon and were met by a heavy fire from the Boers, who by now had crept to within 600 or 800 yards of

the bridge under cover of the big mealie fields that extended along the left bank. The men crossed by swift rushes, and turning sharply to the left crept along under cover of the high bank. Lyttelton and the Rifle Brigade followed. After about a quarter of a mile the leading company of the Durham Light Infantry climbed over the edge of the bank and, extending across the mealie fields, made for Vaal Krantz, still some 1,200 yards away. They instantly came under a heavy rifle-fire from every side; while from the Twin Peaks, from Vaal Krantz and Krantz Kloof, all the Boer guns and pom-poms at once concentrated upon them. For a moment they recoiled to the river bank, leaving their gallant officer, Captain Johnson-Smyth, dead among the mealies. But Colonel Woodland promptly rallied his men, and before long the whole of the Durham Light Infantry and Rifle Brigade were over the bank and rapidly deploying across the fields. Lyttelton directed the Durhams to make straight for the western foot of Vaal Krantz, while the Rifle Brigade were to move to their right front and, after clearing Munger's Farm, from behind the buildings and walls of which the enemy were pouring a most unpleasant fire, to swing to the left and envelop the eastern foot of the hill. Before crossing he had collected all the Maxims of his brigade near the pontoon in order to keep down the fire upon the right flank and rear of his men, which they did to a very considerable extent. He now looked round for his remaining battalions to support the attack, and discovered to his dismay that they were not crossing. A messenger sent back hurriedly returned with the news that Buller himself had stopped them.

Buller loses heart and abandons his plan.

What actually happened was this. After Lyttelton's first two battalions had crossed, Hildyard had, as previously arranged, begun sending over his leading battalions, with orders to occupy the Green Hill and thus cover Lyttelton's flank and hold the defile open for Burn-Murdoch's cavalry and for Hart's brigade. The Devons were already over, and the first two companies of the East Surreys had followed, when Hildyard came down to announce that "the attack was off"! Buller had only sanctioned Lyttelton's advance with hesitation and reluctance. The fire from the right, heavier

apparently than he expected, though far less heavy than he had any right to expect after all his delays, now finally completed the paralysis of battle which had steadily been creeping over him. As at Colenso, and with infinitely less cause, he lost heart and tried to break off the operation half way. It was too late, however, to stop the assault on Vaal Krantz, and, in deference to Lyttelton's appeals, he allowed the Scottish Rifles and 60th to cross. But Vaal Krantz was worthless in itself, and the abandonment of the attack on the Green Hill was the abandonment of the whole scheme for turning the Brakfontein position. Buller had lacked the courage to face the issue of his own plan. The battle of Vaal Krantz was lost in the very moment of victory.

Nevertheless he allows Lyttelton's men to take Vaal Krantz. 4.30 P.M.

For there can be very little doubt that even now the attack could have been pushed through without very heavy losses. The small parties on the Boer left under Field-Cornets Mostert of Fordsburg and Du Preez of Jeppestown had done excellent work in hampering the crossing and harassing the right flank and rear of Lyttelton's advance. But they could not have prevented Hildyard's occupation of the Green Hill, and there were no sufficient forces behind to have stopped the field batteries coming up into the defile or the cavalry forcing their way on to the plain. The main part of Viljoen's force clung to the northern portion of Vaal Krantz and to the hills between it and Krantz Kloof. On the southern portion Viljoen, with barely a hundred men, was endeavouring with desperate courage to check the Light Brigade, now swiftly advancing through the mealies. All the 66 guns in action on and below Swaartz Kop concentrated their fire upon Vaal Krantz, which under this terrific bombardment smoked like a great furnace. A lyddite shell burst over Viljoen's head, stunning him and killing four men close by. When he recovered his senses the Durham Light Infantry were clambering down into a great donga which ran like a moat round the southern and eastern foot of the hill.* A moment later the Rifle Brigade joined on to their right, having cleared

* This donga was too deep to cross near the river, with the result that the attack was delivered from the south-east only and not from the south-west as well.

Munger's Farm. A few minutes to rest and reform, and then the Durham Light Infantry fixed bayonets and charged the southern point of the hill with a cheer. The Rifle Brigade surged up the eastern side of the hill under a heavy fire from its northern end and from the dongas on their right. At 4.30 P.M. the Durham Light Infantry reached the crest, the Rifle Brigade soon after, and together both regiments swept along the ridge for half a mile. The Johannesburgers had made a heroic defence, but they now fled, leaving behind a few prisoners and over fifty dead and wounded. Viljoen himself showed great gallantry in getting away a pom-pom from the northern end of the ridge. The losses of the captors were, thanks to the rapidity of their attack and their wide extension, not very heavy. The Durham Light Infantry had 2 officers killed and 5 wounded and over 80 men killed and wounded. The Rifle Brigade had 3 officers wounded and 70 casualties, almost all wounded, among the men.

Boers promptly open fire on Vaal Krantz. Dispositions for the night.

Vaal Krantz was won. But could it be maintained unsupported? And, if it could, what purpose would its possession serve? As regards the former point, the Boers wasted no time in putting the matter to the test. Directly the hill was captured they opened a heavy and continuous fire upon it from its northern end and from the dongas to the east. It was impossible to hold the eastern face, and Lyttelton was compelled to dispose his men along the half mile of the western face of the hill, which was practically all that he held. Even here they were partially raked by Boers to the north of Vaal Krantz or concealed in a donga running from Brakfontein to the Tugela, down to which they moved in safety now that the feint attack had been withdrawn. The hill was also exposed to shell-fire from the Twin Peaks and Brakfontein, and, subsequently, from Doorn Kop. Fortunately its surface was broken and covered with loose stones, affording material for shelters. Here the men lay, undergoing a far severer strain than they had undergone in the assault. The rest of the army, meanwhile, looked on and did nothing. At last the Boers ceased firing, and Lyttelton was able to make arrangements for the defence. The northern portion of the line was assigned to the Durham

General Ben Viljoen.

Photo by Elliott & Fry

Light Infantry. On their right were the Scottish Rifles, and to their right, again, the Rifle Brigade. The 60th Rifles lay on the western slope, guarding the left flank and acting as reserve to the Durham Light Infantry and Scottish Rifles. The Devons, who had been impressed by Lyttelton when their proper task was abandoned, lay in the donga with two companies on the south-eastern slope of Vaal Krantz, and a detachment in Munger's Farm.

Buller postpones any decision till the morning

As regards the second point, the use which the occupation of Vaal Krantz might be turned to, Buller now sent Colonel àCourt to look at the position and make suggestions. After consulting with Lyttelton, àCourt returned and advised an attack on the Green Hill at dawn to give the army elbow room for deployment and subsequent advance—in other words, the resumption of the original plan. He also suggested the pushing up of guns on the left to help Vaal Krantz, and the construction of a bridge immediately at the foot of the hill. Even now it is not improbable that the original plan would have succeeded, though, no doubt, at heavier cost. But Buller would have none of it, and, having no plan of his own, decided to postpone all further decision till the morning. The Second Division remained at the foot of Swaartz Kop, and the 11th Brigade at the Maconochie Kopjes. Lyttelton and his men remained alone on Vaal Krantz, and spent a weary night constructing scanty shelters. They were disturbed every now and again by firing, which became general once more at dawn.

Boer activity during night. Arrival of reinforcements.

The Boers, meanwhile, had not been idle. The "Long Tom," which, owing to the breaking of a wheel, had been compelled to lie inactive in Doorn Kloof all day, was during the night dragged up almost to the very summit of Doorn Kop, where a small natural hillock was rapidly excavated into an admirable epaulement. Two of the guns from Krantz Kloof were brought round to the northern slopes of Doorn Kloof, and one of the Spion Kop Krupps to a point 3,000 yards north of Vaal Krantz, while a pom-pom was placed on the northern slopes of Green Hill. A telegraph was run from an observation post on the Twin Peaks to Doorn Kloof to direct these guns. From south-east to west the Boer guns

were thus posted round the hill over an arc of more than 180 degrees. Their positions were even better than at Spion Kop, and had the British not been posted far more skilfully, and had they not constructed better cover, they would in all probability have been even more severely punished on the next day. Considerable reinforcements arrived, including 200 men under Lukas Meyer, who took up their position on Doorn Kop. Doorn Kloof, Green Hill, and the dongas east of Vaal Krantz were reinforced, and shelters were constructed on the northern end of Vaal Krantz and manned by Johannesburg and Standerton burghers. In all there were probably well over 2,000 Boers on their left wing by dawn on the 6th, while several hundred more arrived in the course of the morning.

Feb. 6. Buller again unable to come to a decision.

The early hours of the 6th found Buller still undecided. At 4.30 A.M. he sent a message to Lyttelton to say that he would attempt to clear the northern end of Vaal Krantz and the next hill at daybreak with artillery and howitzer fire, and would also try to keep down the fire from Green Hill. Lyttelton was to hold on till 10 A.M., and if the shelling proved ineffectual was then to retire. At 6.45 Buller, in answer to Lyttelton's request for a bridge at the foot of the hill to facilitate the withdrawal, replied that he was transferring No. 2 pontoon to the point suggested, but that he now meant to advance along the western side of Vaal Krantz. His idea was to pass a brigade under the western slope of the hill and attack the next hill under cover of Lyttelton's fire, and half an hour later he submitted the plan to Lyttelton for an opinion. Lyttelton was not very encouraging, and suggested that if an attack were made, the eastern side offered a better chance. Once more Buller relapsed into indecision. But a way out of the unpleasant necessity of deciding himself now occurred to him. Promising that the Light Brigade should be relieved at sundown, he asked Lyttelton whether he could continue holding the hill without heavy loss, as he wished to watch developments for a day.

Buller tries to make Roberts decide for him.

The only military developments of the situation that another day could bring would be the reinforcement of the Boers opposite Vaal Krantz and the strengthening of their

positions. But the developments Buller had in view were of a different kind, and concerned not the military situation so much as his own responsibility for coming to a decision. He now sent the following telegram to Roberts:— Roberts's reply.

"After fighting all day yesterday, though with but small loss, I have pierced the enemy's line, and hold a hill which divides their position, and will, if I can advance, give me access to the Ladysmith plain, when I should be ten miles from White, with but one place for an enemy to stand between us. But to get my artillery and supplies on to the plain, I must drive back the enemy either on my right or on my left. It is an operation which will cost from 2,000 to 3,000 men, and I am not confident, though hopeful, I can do it. The question is how would such a loss affect your plans, and do you think the chance of the relief of Ladysmith worth the risk? It is the only possible way to relieve White; if I give up this chance I know no other."

In other words, after disregarding Roberts's repeated warnings not to commit himself prematurely to a general attack, Buller now attempted to fix upon Roberts the responsibility of extricating him from the dilemma into which he had put himself. Of the alternatives of certain heavy losses and doubtful success on the one side and withdrawal on the other, the tone of Buller's message, taken in conjunction with the previous correspondence, makes it difficult to resist the conclusion that he hoped and expected that Roberts would decide for the latter. At the same time the message was so worded that in case the withdrawal had been followed by the fall of Ladysmith Buller could have pointed to it as evidence of his own readiness to persevere and of his clear realization of the position. Roberts received the message on the eve of his departure for the front. He had entirely disapproved of Buller's attack. He had a strong natural aversion to heavy casualties. But the idea of breaking off the attack half way and letting Ladysmith fall, for fear of the possible losses involved, seemed monstrous to his soldierly spirit. Nor was he the man to shirk responsibility. He at once replied:—

"Ladysmith must be relieved, even at the loss you anticipate. I would certainly persevere, and my hope is that the enemy will

be so severely punished as to enable White's garrison to be withdrawn without great difficulty. Let your troops know that the honour of the Empire is in their hands, and that I have no possible doubt of their being successful."

Artillery duel during morning.

Meanwhile, on the Tugela the morning had been spent in a vigorous artillery duel. At 5.30 A.M. some of the British batteries had pushed forward in front of Swaartz Kop and begun shelling the north-western end of Vaal Krantz. The Boer guns at once disclosed their new positions, mostly firing at Vaal Krantz, the Doorn Kop 6-inch dividing its attentions between Vaal Krantz and the line of guns on Swaartz Kop. With a less tempting target offered them the Boer gunners made no attempt to maintain the same concentrated fire as at Spion Kop, and the British casualties on Vaal Krantz were consequently not very heavy. The overwhelming British artillery was still less effective owing to its ignorance of the scattered Boer positions, and to its inability to make proper use of the occasional clues as to the whereabouts of parties of Boers communicated back from the firing-line. About 6.30 A.M., however, a lucky shot at 11,000 yards from the naval 4·7 on Signal Hill blew up the ammunition wagon of the 6-inch gun and insured its silence for several hours. During the morning No. 2 pontoon bridge was taken up and thrown across the river below Vaal Krantz.

Botha arrives. Boer attack on Vaal Krantz repulsed by 60th Rifles, 3.30 P.M. Hildyard's Brigade relieves Lyttelton's.

About noon Botha arrived on the scene and at once took over the command. His arrival infused new energy into the Boers. The firing had been getting more desultory, but about 3 P.M. the Boers began vigorously shelling the northern portion of Lyttelton's line, at the same time opening a heavy rifle-fire on the low wall held by the advanced line of the Durham Light Infantry. The British shells had set fire to the grass some 300–400 yards in front of the wall, and taking advantage of this a number of Boers crept forward and, suddenly bursting through the smoke, opened a terrific fire upon the advanced line, which under this unexpected attack wavered and gave way. The Boers rushed forward, and for a moment it looked as if they would carry everything

before them. But the half battalion of the 60th in reserve saw and acted instantly. Scarcely waiting for orders, they sprang up, fixed bayonets, and charged with a rousing cheer. The Boers heard the cheer, saw them coming, and turned tail. The wall was reoccupied (3.30 P.M.). The whole affair only lasted ten minutes. At 5 P.M. Hildyard's brigade began relieving Lyttelton's across the new bridge, and by 9 P.M. the whole of the weary Light Brigade were in bivouac at the foot of Swaartz Kop. The Queen's, East Surrey, and West Yorks held the firing-line from north to south in the order named. The Devons, who had remained on the left bank, took the place of the 60th as reserve, and were replaced in the donga and at Munger's by the Connaught Rangers, borrowed from Hart's brigade. The newcomers set to work so diligently to improve the slight shelters built by the Light Brigade that their casualties next day were quite insignificant.

Feb. 7. Buller still undecided. 4 P.M. he calls a council of war which agrees to abandon Vaal Krantz and try Hlangwane.

With daylight on the 7th the weary bombardment began again. No fresh attempt to attack Vaal Krantz was made, for Botha no doubt realized that the occupation of a portion of the hill was no serious danger to him, and grudged wasting the lives of his men. Wynne's brigade was ordered over from Potgieter's to Swaartz Kop. But, though it added to the confusion of brigades here crowded together, it was not destined to come into action. Buller, still vainly trying to make up his mind, rode out early with Warren to reconnoitre the position as far as that could be done from the right bank. Roberts's reply had only increased his perplexity, for he was by now less than ever inclined to take the risks of an attack. Later in the day Warren volunteered to examine himself the shape of the ground beyond Vaal Krantz with a view to an advance. Crawling into the firing-line on the hill, he came to the conclusion that the low hills and donga-intersected ground beyond could be cleared, though not without very heavy loss. His report was not very encouraging for an advance, but neither did it give a definite lead for withdrawal. Finally at 4 P.M. Buller summoned a council of war at Clery's camp.* Warren, Clery, Lyttelton, Hart, and Wynne were present. Buller put the situation to

* Clery had been ill with blood poisoning since the morning of the 6th.

them, mentioning, apparently, that Roberts was in favour of continuing the attempt, but certainly not communicating to them the actual wording of his telegram. He asked if they still advocated persistence in an advance by Vaal Krantz. Hart alone, who never shrank from any enterprise, was for advance, and volunteered to carry out the original plan by clearing Doorn Kop and Green Hill with his brigade. Warren recommended withdrawal on the condition that Buller should resume the attack at some other point. Asked by Buller to suggest a point, he recommended an attempt to get to Bulwana by way of Hlangwane, and the council and Buller readily fell in with the suggestion. They considered, and by now with reason, that, as long as they fought somewhere, there was hardly any place that did not offer better prospects of success than the one they were in. Immediately after the council Buller telegraphed to Roberts that in view of the superiority of the Boer positions to his right and left, and of the fact that he was "outclassed" by their guns, it was useless waste of life to force a passage which would still fail to free the road to Ladysmith, and that he now intended to make a "desperate effort" to take Bulwana. To White he signalled that he was going to slip back to Chieveley and would be at Hlangwane on the 10th.

Feebleness of the Vaal Krantz operation.

Thus ended one of the feeblest performances in the history of war. There can be little doubt that, in spite of the futility of the feint attack and of the waste of time on the 5th, the original plan would have succeeded at any time up to the morning of the 6th, as, indeed, almost any reasonably planned attack anywhere along the Tugela line would have succeeded if pushed with the least promptitude and resolution. Even on the 6th and 7th the attack might have succeeded, though, undoubtedly, at the cost of heavy losses. But with Buller's collapse at the very outset of the attack the whole plan was allowed to evaporate, and there remained in its place the mere capture and occupation of Vaal Krantz. In its planlessness, and in the useless exposure of a few regiments to the concentration of all the enemy's guns and rifles, while a whole army sat looking on, the Vaal Krantz performance must be reckoned as even inferior to Spion Kop.

That it was not so disastrous was due to other causes than better generalship at the head. Vaal Krantz showed that Buller was no whit superior to Warren in his actual conduct of operations, while it also displayed a weakness and instability of purpose to which Warren, who, with all his slowness and hesitation, still preserved a certain tenacious logical consistency, had not sunk. Nor can any part of the failure in this case be credited to the troops or to subordinate commanders. The feint attack was a complicated manœuvre, conducted with admirable precision; the Light Brigade carried out their attack with equal skill and gallantry, and both they and the 2nd Brigade showed steadiness and endurance in hanging on to an awkward and unpleasant position. The failure of the guns lay mainly in their bad tactical position; had Buller sent them over the river in rear of Lyttelton and Hildyard they would soon have rendered the Brakfontein trenches untenable. Vaal Krantz was Buller, and Buller alone.

The retirement to Chieveley.

At 7 P.M. orders were issued for a general retirement to Springfield. Hildyard began withdrawing his men at 9 P.M., and, except for some firing from the pickets, the retirement was unmolested. Once over the river the brigade lay down on the plain in line of quarter columns, while the indefatigable pontoon troop dismantled the bridges. No attempt was made to picket the river banks for any distance, and if the Boers had been sufficiently wide-awake and enterprising they might have effected an unpleasant surprise. Meanwhile the transport continued all through the night to drag its way up the hill back to Spearman's Camp. At 5 A.M. on the 8th the 2nd, 4th and 5th Brigades, all under Lyttelton (Clery now being definitely on the sick-list), marched to Springfield Bridge, helped on their way by parting shots from the big gun on Doorn Kop. The men were thoroughly weary, sulky, and disheartened by the incapacity with which they had been handled by generals who continuously made targets of them, and yet never gave them a chance of tackling their enemy on fair terms. But a bathe at Springfield soon restored them to their customary serene equanimity. The rest of the force, under Warren, covered

the withdrawal of baggage, guns and stores (558 wagon-loads), which was not completed till midday on the 10th, when Warren marched off from Spearman's to Springfield. With a little enterprise the Boers could easily have made his withdrawal very unpleasant; but though Botha strongly urged this, the commandos made no response to his exhortations.* On the 10th Lyttelton marched to Pretorius's Farm, and on the next day to Chieveley, where he was joined on the 12th by Warren. The only force left near the Upper Tugela was the cavalry brigade, which, with the York and Lancasters, Imperial Light Infantry, "A" Battery, R.H.A., and two naval 12-pounders, remained at Springfield Bridge under Burn-Murdoch. The total casualties for this third attempt to relieve Ladysmith were 3 officers and 31 men killed, or died of wounds, and 17 officers and 318 men wounded. The Boer loss was 30–40 killed and 40–50 wounded, mostly on the first day.

Buller's further telegrams to Roberts.

Meanwhile Buller, arriving at Chieveley on the 9th, sent two extraordinary telegrams to Roberts. In the first he informed Roberts that the operations of the last three weeks had borne in upon him that he had seriously miscalculated the detaining power of the Ladysmith garrison, which, as he now professed to believe, did not detain 2,000 Boers, and that consequently his prospects of success were very small, though he would keep on attacking. The second began by stating that the fate of Ladysmith was only a question of days unless he was very considerably reinforced, and went on to complain that when he undertook to try and relieve Ladysmith he had expected to be able to avail himself of the Sixth and Seventh Divisions, of which Roberts had since deprived him. The message concluded by warning Roberts that he was running a grave risk in letting the fate of Ladysmith wait upon such a mere chance as the fulfilment of his anticipations of the result of his march to Bloemfontein, that he himself would sooner "be sacrificed" than lose Ladysmith, and that he wished his views laid before the Secretary of

* On the 12th, however, Botha, with 100 men, crossed at Schiet Drift to reconnoitre and had a skirmish with a squadron of Royal Dragoons, wounding five and capturing seven men.

State. These petulant messages, with their undisguised attempt to father all the blame for his failures on White's incapacity and Roberts's rash optimism, reached Roberts in the midst of all the anxieties and worries of the start from Modder River. With extraordinary patience and forbearance Roberts replied on the 10th in a long telegram recapitulating the facts of the situation, and concluding by requesting Buller to maintain a bold front but act strictly on the defensive. Buller replied on the 12th that he had no desire to interfere with Roberts's plans, but that he entreated him, if he valued the safety of Ladysmith, not to order him to remain on the defensive and leave the Boers to throw themselves upon White. Roberts at once agreed, in a message of the 14th, that Buller should harass the Boers, and in fact act as he thought best, as long as he did not compromise his force. He reminded Buller that he had only asked him to act on the defensive in view of his assertion that the fate of Ladysmith was a matter of days, and that he was powerless to relieve it. Had Roberts felt any great confidence in Warren * or Clery, or been able to spare Kitchener from his side, he would probably have superseded Buller on the spot. As it was there was nothing for it but to trust that his own operations would materially affect the situation in Natal.

Failure of the Waschbank expedition.

We must now go back for a moment to the little expedition of the Colonial Scouts which was to have fallen upon the Boer communications at Waschbank at the moment that Buller originally hoped to relieve Ladysmith. Going across country by the Lower Tugela Colonel Addison reached Nqutu on the 18th. Here he could get no information that Buller's attack had begun, and on the other hand the reports of strong Boer forces attempting to close in upon him were so alarming that he fell back, hanging about for a fortnight waiting for orders, till finally ordered to retire on Eshowe,

* See p. 305. Roberts, however, on the 11th informed Buller that he wished to know if Warren's opinion on the situation coincided with his. Upon this Warren wrote a long minute on the 13th, the gist of which was that he agreed with both Buller and Roberts, and thought the best thing was that Buller should go slowly pounding away at the Boer trenches with his artillery while Roberts marched on Bloemfontein, which was, more or less, the policy actually carried out.

which he reached on February 8. Here his force was incorporated in what was known as the Melmoth Field Force,* which operated in front of Eshowe to secure the Zulu border, under command of Colonel A. W. Morris, and was now reinforced by a naval detachment of two guns, the Natal Field Artillery, and 150 Natal Royal Rifles. At the same time Buller sent Colonel Bethune with his M.I. and two guns, Natal Field Artillery, to reinforce the Umvoti Mounted Rifles at Greytown and the Tugela Ferry, where they arrived on February 12. These movements seem to have caused some increase of the Boers on their left flank, and to have given the impression that Buller might possibly make his next attempt in that direction. At any rate Joubert seems to have thought them sufficiently important to warrant his visiting Helpmakaar a few days after Vaal Krantz.

Joubert urges Kruger to sue for peace.

Joubert, indeed, was convinced, in spite of the last two victories, that the Boer defence on the Tugela was steadily weakening, and would be broken through sooner or later if the British persevered. After Vaal Krantz he once more urged upon Kruger the desirability of making peace, but without effect. Kruger would not listen. Even if he had listened it was now too late. With Vaal Krantz the Boers had won the last success which might still have affected the course of the war. A few days later fell the long-gathered blow, which, crumpling up the thin line of their defence, struck straight at the heart of their country.

* See p. 100.

CHAPTER XII

THE EVOLUTION OF LORD ROBERTS'S PLAN

Lord Roberts. His career.

FROM the interminable, aimless delays of the movement to the Upper Tugela, from the confusion and blundering of Spion Kop, from the painful hesitation of Vaal Krantz, we must now turn our attention to the orderly development and laborious, purposeful preparation of a real plan of campaign, destined ere long, through swift, untiring execution, to lead to well-earned victory, and to change the whole face of the war. But before doing so we must first cast a glance at the man to whom, in the hour of danger, the British Government had turned to restore the shaken prestige of the British Army, and to carry the war through to a successful conclusion. Field-Marshal Lord Roberts of Kandahar was already in his sixty-eighth year. His experience of war dated back to the troubled days of the Indian Mutiny, and nearly twenty years had passed since that Afghan campaign in which he finally established his reputation as a leader of men. Since then he had held for seven years and more* the supreme command of the forces in India, a period marked by many far-reaching reforms, and by a great development of India's military power. After forty-one years of Indian service Lord Roberts had come home to take up the command of the forces in Ireland, and was now fast approaching the expiration of his command and that honourable retirement to which his age and past services entitled him. But to a mind incessantly active, to a body steeled by continuous hard exercise, and to nerves firm strung by simple and abstemious living, the years had made little

* 1885–1893.

difference. Though the world at large looked upon Lord Roberts as a soldier whose career lay behind him, his friends knew that the sword within the scabbard was as bright and keen as ever, if the occasion for its use should arise.

His character and military qualities.

Small, wiry and alert, with quick grey eyes sparkling, as a rule, with good humour, but on rare occasion capable of blazing with fiercest anger, his outward appearance was the true counterpart of his mental disposition. Of his more intimate personal traits this is hardly the place to speak, though no sketch would be complete without a reference to the simple piety which, as in the case of more than one great soldier, formed so large an element in his character. As man and soldier alike he was essentially an Irishman, a typical representative of that adventurous and ambitious breed of Irish gentry, which has played so conspicuous a part in the history of the British Army. His unaffected geniality and kindliness won the hearts of all officers who served with him, while his personal gallantry, his success, and his genuine and untiring interest in the welfare of the common soldier endeared "Bobs" to the Army as a whole. He relied on the personal affection and the natural ambition of his subordinates to secure their good work, rather than on their fear of punishment; and if, perhaps, he lacked somewhat of the impersonal hardness required in a great organizer, he also proved more than once that his officers would work and his men march and fight for him as they would have done for no other leader. Of the qualities essential to generalship, he was gifted with the imaginative intuition necessary to divine the movements and the intentions of an enemy, with the courage of his own judgment, and with the true thirst for victory—the keen will to achieve his main purpose, undistracted by subsidiary issues, and ever fresh in spite of worries or delays. Above all he possessed in a rare degree the unconquerable optimism that can disregard all dangers and difficulties once a course of action is decided on. At Charasiab, at the Peiwar Kotal, on the march to Kandahar, he had shown, as he was to show at more than one critical moment of his South African campaign, that the sense of danger and the haunting fear of failure could never disturb

his serene confidence in the ultimate success of his plans. If we add an almost unerring eye for country, we get a combination of qualities not easy to surpass. As for his defects, they were in the main those of his qualities. His optimism tended on occasion to make him too easily satisfied with success instead of pushing his advantage to the uttermost, too ready to believe that his enemy was crushed when he was only dispersed. His skill in manœuvre, combined with his natural humanity, too often inclined him to forget that killing is the primary and normal method of compassing the great objects of strategy, and that those objects can rarely be secured without freely sacrificing the lives of one's own men. His quickness, confidence and decision displayed themselves at their best in the field and while on the move; the conduct of prolonged and scattered operations from a central office was less suited to the genius of one who was a consummate player of the great game of war, rather than a methodical organizer of manslaughter, regarded only as a vast and complicated business, devoid of the element of personal conflict.

Value of Roberts's Indian experience.

His military experience, confined almost wholly to India, was, perhaps, less varied than that of many other British generals. But that could be reckoned a gain rather than a loss. In India alone had there been within the last forty years operations on a sufficiently large scale, and against enemies sufficiently formidable from the tactical point of view, to afford scope for real strategy. Even in peace the Indian manœuvres provided opportunities for the handling of large bodies of men over considerable areas to which there was nothing comparable in England. And whereas in those days high appointments in the British Army in peace time only meant absorption in administrative routine and forgetfulness of all thoughts of war, the supreme command in India, which Roberts held so long, was an office that kept ever before the mind of its holder a series of great strategical problems.*

* The internal organization of the Indian Army, moreover, though not on the level of modern scientific organization, was far better fitted for training generals than the British system. The Quartermaster-General's department, in which Roberts found his career, was much nearer a

During all his years in command strategy on the great scale had been the one pre-occupation of Roberts's mind. On entering office he had laid down a policy for the North-West Frontier, based partly on his own Afghan experiences, but no less on a wide historical view of war and a clear insight into the plausible folly of passive defence. Year after year he had worked away at it, inspiring viceroys and subalterns alike with his earnestness, and before he left India he had laid securely the foundations upon which his successors have since continued to build.

Roberts accepts the command. The departure from Southampton.

On the morning of December 17 Lord Roberts received the news of his only son's death. A few hours later, at the call of duty, he put his great sorrow behind him, and undismayed by the difficulty of the task, undeterred by the weight of his years, accepted the command, conscious of his fitness to hold it, and confident in his power to retrieve the failure of his predecessor, and to restore victory to the British arms. His preparations were few and brief. The five days intervening before the departure of the next steamer sufficed for them and for the selection of the necessary staff of the new Headquarters. On December 23, a dreary winter day, Roberts left Southampton. There is always something profoundly affecting in the moment when a great ship casts off for a distant voyage. But rarely have events given a deeper significance or a more dramatic emotion to such a scene than on that occasion when in the deepest gloom of defeat the *Dunottar Castle* glided majestically from the quay on her voyage of 6,000 miles, bearing with her the fortunes of the campaign, perhaps of the British Empire—an old sorrow-stricken little man dressed in deep mourning, who raised his hat in response to the respectful and sympathetic cheers from the shore, and then turned away to pace the deck, already revolving in his mind the plan of victory.

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general staff than anything that could be found in the British Army, and the complete separation of the military and administrative departments, however inconvenient in some respects, at any rate left generals free to regard the training of their men and the study of military problems as their chief duties.

Lord Kitchener. His experience and qualities.

Of the large staff* that accompanied Lord Roberts, two or three deserve special mention. As Chief of the Staff the Government had selected, at Roberts's own request, Major-General Lord Kitchener of Khartoum, Sirdar of the Egyptian Army. A comparatively young soldier, the victor of Omdurman had not yet completed his fiftieth year. His military experience had been mainly confined to the narrow limits of Egyptian territory, and his reconquest of the Sudan, brilliant as it was, had afforded no opportunity for a display of conspicuous strategy or tactical skill. What it had displayed was the talent for administration and the rigid economy that could build up an army on an infinitesimal budget; the patience and foresight that could plan and prepare a campaign for years; the resolution and driving power that could overcome all the natural obstacles of distance and desert that lay between planning and execution. It would be difficult to find a greater contrast, whether in appearance or in mental qualities, than that existing between Roberts and his Chief of the Staff. Though Kitchener was sprung from a family settled in Ireland, there was little of the Irishman in his burly figure or in his square-jawed, heavy-moustached, inscrutable face. Sure calculation rather than sudden intuition, inflexible strength of will rather than buoyant confidence, were his chief characteristics. Where Roberts trusted to his insight into the personal factor, whether in his enemy or in his subordinates, Kitchener put his faith in energy, organization, and numbers. Without Roberts's consummate mastery of the art of war, Kitchener possessed certain compensating qualities less fully developed in his chief: the instinct to destroy, the indifference to life, and the determination to push the results of victory to the utmost. Towards his subordinates Kitchener was commonly reported to be a second Duke of Wellington—a hard, exacting taskmaster indifferent to their feelings or their interests. Allowing for customary exaggera-

* See the diagram with the names of the headquarters staff at the end of the volume. It should be borne in mind that in the main it was only the personal and operations staff that Roberts took out with him. The technical and administrative staff, directors of supplies and transport, of railways, of medical services, etc., he took over from Buller, who left these at Cape Town when he called away the rest of his staff to Natal.

tion, the fact remains that he was determined to secure good work, and would let neither good-nature nor indolence prevail against that determination.

His position on the staff.

Many doubted whether Kitchener was not too self-willed and absolute, both by nature and by habit, ever to accommodate himself to the position of a subordinate. The doubters misjudged a character which was as supple as it was strong and was, under the influence of sincere personal regard and admiration, to prove itself as capable of loyal subservience as of autocratic power. Rarely have characters so different combined, on the spur of the moment, to form so effective and smooth-working a partnership. The particular position of Chief of the Staff for which Kitchener was selected did not, in the absence of a scientific system of staff organization in the British Army, imply any very specific duties or call for any special training. In the sequel he was used by his chief not so much as a staff officer, to work out his plans and convey his orders, but mainly as his right hand man, on whom he could, with implicit confidence, devolve any important piece of organizing work that turned up, or whom he could send round to "hustle" departments and subordinate commanders—an arrangement whose advantages and defects the narrative will show. At the moment of his appointment Kitchener was at Khartoum engaged in the task of building a new city and creating a new administration on the ruins of the Dervish power, the last remnants of which had just been crushed by his lieutenants.* Leaving Khartoum on the 18th of December, he reached Alexandria on the 21st after three days by steamer and train, was there taken on board by the cruiser *Isis*, and joined Roberts at Gibraltar on the 26th.

Major Henderson, Director of Intelligence.

As his Director of Intelligence, Roberts took with him Major G. F. R. Henderson, at that moment Professor of Military History at the Staff College. A brilliant writer and a profound thinker on the great problems of strategy and tactics, Henderson was an officer who under a better system would naturally have risen to the highest positions on the

* On November 24 Colonel Wingate brought the fugitive Khalifa to bay at Om Debrikat. The Khalifa, Ahmed Fedil, most of the principal emirs and over 1,000 Dervishes fell in this action.

General Staff. As it was, his selection for an important post on Roberts's staff was due solely to the latter's wise courage and disregard of convention in picking out from his comparatively humble position—for such it was considered in the perverse and foolish contempt for the scientific student and for the teacher, which pervaded, and still pervades, our military system, and indeed our whole national life—one in whose writings he had discerned a kindred spirit. Unfortunately illness, destined ere long to end fatally,* deprived Roberts of his services within a few weeks of the opening of his campaign. Yet even in that short time, in the long walks up and down the decks of the *Dunottar Castle* on the voyage, in the many colloquies during the days of preparation at Cape Town, the fertile suggestions and sober criticisms of the author of 'Stonewall Jackson' played no small part in confirming the native intuition and strengthening the resolution of his chief.

Colonel Nicholson and General Kelly-Kenny.

The only other member of the Staff whose name calls for special mention is Colonel W. G. Nicholson,† an officer of exceptional capacity and of great experience of staff work, whose cautious critical judgment and skilled pen Roberts had long since learned to value in India. It was from that country, where he was occupying the post of Adjutant-General, that Roberts now summoned Nicholson to meet him at Cape Town. Originally appointed as Military Secretary, he was subsequently entrusted with the direction of the transport service, but continued to be largely employed by his chief, in his personal capacity, for a variety of responsible and confidential duties. Not on the staff, but a fellow-passenger, and one of the informal deck council with whom Lord Roberts discussed, without ever fully revealing, the great schemes maturing in his mind, was General Kelly-Kenny, commander of the Sixth Division, a shrewd, drily humorous Irishman of long and varied experience of military administration. As for the rest

* Colonel Henderson died in March, 1903, leaving a gap in the scanty ranks of British military thinkers which will not easily be filled.

† Now Lieut.-General Sir W. G. Nicholson, K.C.B. Nicholson reached Cape Town on January 18, the same steamer bringing Colonel Neville Chamberlain, Roberts's private secretary, General Tucker, commanding the Seventh Division, and General Hector MacDonald, Wauchope's successor in the command of the Highland Brigade.

of the staff, it is enough to say that it comprised a great many hard-working, capable officers of varied experience, and the usual miscellaneous collection of secretaries, titled aides-de-camp, and other personal attendants.*

The nucleus idea of Roberts's plan. Its difference from the original War Office plan.

Military history contains no more fascinating study than the progressive development of a great strategical plan in the hands of a master. We see it beginning as a mere rough idea or intuition; gradually and slowly shaping itself in contact with the tedious and harassing details of organization, and the necessities of a complicated military situation; then suddenly launched on its career; transformed hourly with the changing fortunes of the field; and yet preserving throughout the under-lying motive and purpose of its author. In this instance the central idea, the nucleus, as it were, of his plan of campaign, had long been fixed in Roberts's mind. Two years and more before the outbreak of the war he had worked out the question with a pair of keen junior officers in the Intelligence Division. Already then he had resolved that the correct course to pursue was, not to push up along the railway lines leading directly to the enemy's capital, either through Natal or Central Cape Colony,† but to utilize the line of railway running along the Western frontiers of the Republics as the jumping-off point of a flank march at Pretoria or Bloemfontein, whose success should afterwards open up the direct and natural lines of communication. The difference between this plan and those discussed at the War Office, of which the advance up the central line was eventually adopted, was not a mere difference as to choice of route, but was based on a fundamental divergence in the strategical point of view. The difficulties and risks of Roberts's plan were obvious. It involved throwing the whole burden of maintaining the army

* H.R.H. the Duke of Connaught, who had already previously applied for any sort of employment in South Africa, had again asked to be attached to Lord Roberts's staff in any capacity, a request which the Government, however, refused to sanction.

† See vol. ii., p. 119. In 1897, however, the contingency of the Free State joining in the war was less certain, and it was in the shape of a march from Mafeking to Pretoria quite as much as in that of a march from Orange River or Kimberley to Bloemfontein that the problem originally presented itself to Roberts's mind.

on a single line of railway, and that the longest and most exposed; it necessitated the organization of a field transport capable of moving a hundred miles or more from its railway base; and it implied the possibility of disaster to the whole force if the march should fail to secure a victory sufficiently decisive to bring about the speedy opening of direct railway communication with the bases on the coast. The War Office plan enabled the troops to be disembarked at three harbours and brought to the front by three converging lines; it allowed of the advance keeping an open railway communication behind it all the way; and in case of failure it involved nothing worse than the standstill of the force or a withdrawal along the line of its advance. And yet, with all its advantages, it neglected one essential factor in strategy, the resistance of the enemy. To avoid mere difficulties of organization and military technique, it tied the British advance down to a prescribed route. And it did so because it assumed throughout that the British force could always push its way through the Boers, wherever it met them and however well prepared they might be to meet it. What was wrong with the "steam-roller" plan of operations—to quote an expression frequently applied to Buller's army at the outset of the war—was not its strategical form, but the underlying assumption of an overwhelming superiority of tactical strength, in other words the fundamental mistake with which the campaign was opened. Roberts was accustomed to take his opponents more seriously, and to his mind the problem was not how to get most conveniently to Bloemfontein, dispersing the Boers on the way, but how to tackle the Boers under conditions most favourable to himself and least favourable to them. The passage of the Orange River in face of the enemy, and at points where the latter could most conveniently concentrate his forces, the slow advance along a fixed route which the Boers would have every opportunity of attempting to bar in force, did not seem to him to fulfil those conditions. And so, in spite of all the technical difficulties and military dangers, he preferred a plan which gave him the crossing of the Orange River without fighting, which turned the Boer front and threatened their lines of communications and their capital,

and which enabled him to march freely across open country in any direction he might choose.

The difference illustrated by Buller's suggestion of a railway to Bloemfontein.

The difference between Roberts's conception of strategy and that of the man whom he succeeded is well illustrated by the suggestion Buller telegraphed home at the very moment Roberts was sailing, namely, that a railway should be built eastwards from Modder River towards Bloemfontein, along which the army should advance.* That such a railway would have facilitated the supplying of an irresistible force marching on Bloemfontein, and would in the long run have made it easier to control the southern Free State, may well be admitted. Unfortunately, the British troops were not irresistible. If they could not force their way along any of the existing railway lines, why should they have been more likely to succeed in forcing their way along a line which they had laboriously to build as they advanced, and which the Boers could equally well head off with their intrenchments? And even if the army had been strong enough to overcome all resistance, its progress would have been too slow† to affect the fate either of Ladysmith or of Kimberley, while the conveyance of the materials for the construction of the new railway would have seriously interfered with the concentration of troops and munitions of war along the existing lines. However applicable to the leisurely reconquest of the Sudan against Dervishes, the idea of setting to work, at the most critical moment of the war, to circumvent the Boers by building a new railway to Bloemfontein was a military absurdity, and Roberts, who received the suggestion at Gibraltar, was fully justified in refusing to treat it seriously.

Evolution of the plan on the journey. Its first shape.

It must not, however, be supposed that Roberts had already settled upon a definite cut-and-dried plan before starting. Such a plan could only be framed in contact with

* See p. 108.

† Colonel Girouard, Director of Railways, declared himself ready to build a mile a day without interfering with the ordinary military traffic. At this rate Bloemfontein would have been reached by April, at the very earliest, and probably not till May. Whether this railway might not, with advantage, have been constructed after the army reached Bloemfontein is, of course, a very different question.

the actual situation on his arrival, and to send any specific instructions at that moment might not only have prematurely betrayed his intentions, but have proved confusing and even mischievous. Accordingly Roberts's first telegram to Buller, sent just before embarkation, contained no more definite statement of his views than an announcement of his intention to adhere to the original plan * of advancing through the Orange Free State in force, and an urgent request for the fullest information on the state of the land transport service to be ready for him on his arrival. If in the meanwhile Buller relieved Ladysmith, Roberts suggested that he should evacuate it and fall back to the Tugela, while Methuen should fall back on Orange River if he succeeded in relieving Kimberley. Failing, however, the relief of Kimberley, Roberts added in his message from Gibraltar, Methuen should stay on at Modder River as long as he safely could. On December 28 he sent a further message from Madeira suggesting the maintenance of the *status quo* at all points, even including Natal. During the voyage the plan began gradually to shape itself. The form it first took was that of an advance directed due east or even south-east from Orange River Station so as to strike the central line of railway at Edenburg or some point nearer Springfontein.† Such a march would threaten, at one and the same moment, the communications of the Boer forces south of the Orange River and the safety of Bloemfontein. The one threat could be relied upon to clear Cape Colony and give Roberts the control of the railway communications through Springfontein to Port Elizabeth and East London, the other to draw off a large part of the Boer forces round Ladysmith and Kimberley, and thus make it easier for Buller and Methuen to relieve those places. That an army's communications are its weakest point, and should be one of the first objects for attack, has been a leading

* *I.e.*, as contrasted with the diversion of forces to Natal. There is no reference to the Norval's Pont-Bethulie advance, though Buller seems to have concluded that this was Roberts's intention. The object of the message was not to explain Roberts's own views, but to prevent Buller committing the forces to any further entanglements or withdrawing more troops from Cape Colony to Natal.

† This view was more particularly advocated by Kelly-Kenny.

principle of most great strategists from Napoleon downwards. The disconcerting effect of a threatened advance on an enemy's capital is another lesson of history that Roberts was not likely to be forgetful of, even if he had not within the last few months refreshed his memory with Henderson's striking descriptions of the effect of the Confederate demonstrations against Washington upon the strategy of the Federal leaders. But above all Roberts realized—and realized it not merely as a theoretical commonplace to be assented to and then dismissed from thought, but as the law of his action—that against any enemy capable of fighting on even approximately equal terms the essence of strategy lies in surprise, and in that rapidity and freedom of movement by which alone it becomes possible to surprise one's enemy and to impose upon him, in the midst of hurry and uncertainty, the alternative of abandoning some important objective or of trying the fortune of battle under conditions not of his own choosing. Whatever modifications the plan might yet undergo, Roberts was resolved that it should neither be obvious in its direction nor slow in its execution.

Situation on Roberts's arrival.

On January 10 Roberts landed at Cape Town. It may well have been an anxious moment for him, wondering what fresh change for the worse the military position might not have undergone, setting all his calculations at defiance. But from every quarter the news was satisfactory. From Buller the new Commander-in-Chief found two conflicting missives awaiting him with regard to the situation in Natal: one a letter of December 28,* pointing out that the Boer position on the Tugela could not be turned, as Roberts had suggested in his telegram of December 23, but must be forced; the other a telegram announcing that Buller was just starting on his turning movement by the Upper Tugela. Although, on general grounds, Roberts would have preferred delaying this movement till his own preparations were more advanced, yet, in his ignorance of the exact state of affairs at Ladysmith and on the Tugela, he rightly judged it best not to interfere

* This letter also contained a suggestion that the main advance on Bloemfontein should be made from Modder River by way of Jacobsdal. See Evidence of War Commission, ii. p. 177.

with Buller's discretion. He accordingly confined himself in the following days to sending Buller his good wishes, expressing the hope that White would co-operate, and vainly urging the supreme importance of rapidity. In Cape Colony the British forces were everywhere holding their own, and the gaps between them were gradually being closed. The High Commissioner, indeed, was still extremely anxious about the attitude of the Dutch population, and the danger of a general rising in rear of the British troops was one which Roberts had to take into serious consideration. But the worst was over, and in the absence of fresh defeats in the field there was good reason to hope that things might be kept quiet for a few weeks longer.

Roberts orders the generals to mark time.

Roberts's immediate care, accordingly, was not to begin any offensive operation at once, but simply to safeguard and improve the existing position till everything was ready for him to strike a decisive blow. The Sixth Division was just landing, and Methuen was eagerly asking for it in order to carry out the relief of Kimberley by a flank march through Jacobsdal. But Roberts ordered him to act strictly on the defensive, and, so far from granting the desired reinforcement, hinted that he might even have to withdraw one of his brigades and part of his cavalry.* The division was sent to Naauwpoort, the 12th Brigade, under General Clements, being pushed forward as reinforcement to French, to enable him to save his hard-worked cavalry for more important work in the future, and as a precaution, in case a successful advance by Buller in Natal should induce the Boers to attempt a counterstroke against Cape Colony. Kelly-Kenny with the rest was to work eastward from Naauwpoort and endeavour to restore as much as possible of the Rosmead-Stormberg line of railway, both to take the immediate pressure off Gatacre and to facilitate the strategical transference of troops after the main advance should have taken effect in clearing Cape Colony. Gatacre, too, who was eager to carry out a reconnaissance in force towards Stormberg, was ordered to keep strictly on the defensive for the present. But

* Roberts, however, sent him four 4·7 siege guns to strengthen his position and enable him to keep the Boers occupied.

Roberts was none the less anxious to recover Stormberg and clear north-eastern Cape Colony, and it was for this special object that he destined the Colonial Division under Colonel Brabant, whose formation he sanctioned a few days after his arrival.* This force, eventually some 3,000 strong, was to advance round Gatacre's right, occupy Dordrecht and Jamestown, and, if possible, manœuvre the Boers out of their position at Stormberg.

Question of seizing Norval's Pont. Misleading effect of Roberts's dispositions.

There was one really bold step, indeed, which Roberts, impressed by French's recent successes, was at first prepared to sanction, if French was convinced of its being possible. The sudden seizure of Norval's Pont bridge by a well-planned *coup de main* would have been of such incalculable assistance to Roberts's schemes that it might well have been worth running some risk to attempt. But, on consideration, the difficulty of securing the bridge intact and of defending a position on the north bank caused the suggestion to be abandoned. Whether Roberts, in making it, had a passing idea of abandoning his own plan and reverting to the original line of advance is doubtful. More probably his chief thought was of the advantage of saving the bridge and thus being able to transfer his communications to the railway the moment he reached it by his flank march. But, in any case, the natural conclusion drawn at the time from the various measures now carried out or discussed was that Roberts intended to carry on the original plan of campaign, and that the clearing of central and eastern Cape Colony would be followed by a direct advance on Bloemfontein along the railway. They thus served most effectively to mislead the world at large, and even his own subordinates, with regard to his real intentions.

Methuen and French during January.

The operations at the front during the next three weeks were, accordingly, of a purely temporizing character. Methuen, confining himself strictly to his instructions, demonstrated with his newly-arrived guns of position against the Boer trenches on January 16 and 23. To check the parties of Boers who were again beginning to roam about in the country west of the railway, a small force under Colonel Rochfort Boyd was sent out from Belmont to camp twelve miles out at Richmond,

* See p. 95. Brabant was gazetted brigadier-general on January 18.

VAALKRANTZ

February 4-8 1900

DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns

TO LADYSMITH 13 MILES
BRAKFONTEIN
KRANTZ KLOOF
SPION KOP
TWIN PEAKS
VAAL KRANTZ FARM
VAALKRANTZ
KAFFIR KRAAL
TO LADYSMITH
DOORN KLOOF
GREEN HILL
MUNGER'S FARM
MUNGER'S DRIFT
MEALIE FIELDS
MACONOCHIE KOPJES
R. TUGELA
Pont
Potgieter's Drift
SWAARTZ KOP
GUN PLATEAU
FROM SPRINGFIELD
MOUNT ALICE
NAVAL GUN HILL (SIGNAL HILL)
Dundonald Feb. 7
TO FRERE 13½ MILES
Schiet Drift

Scale 2 Inches to 1 Mile 31680
1000 0 1000 2000 3000 Yards
0 1 2 Miles

Heights are taken above point A

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and on the 23rd moved forward to Rooi Pan near Sunnyside, while a handful of Rimington's Guides patrolled the country beyond. At Rensburg French was enabled, by the arrival of Clements with the Royal Irish and Worcestershire Regiments on January 15, to extend his lines still more widely. On the 18th Clements was placed in command of the right wing, and took up his headquarters, with two and a half battalions, two squadrons and four horse-guns, at Slingersfontein. Porter, with four squadrons, two horse-guns, and an infantry company, moved eight miles further east to Potfontein, while Rimington, with two squadrons and his Guides, was posted north of him at Kleinfontein, where by a variety of clever stratagems—ostentatiously reinforcing his posts at daybreak with detachments sent away from the same posts an hour or two earlier, keeping up imaginary outpost lines with cow-dung fires, etc.—he succeeded in creating the impression that he was threatening the Boer communications with a considerable force. On the 20th two 5-inch howitzers, just arrived from England, were brought into action against the Boer positions west of Colesberg, and drew a heavy fire. French now applied to Kelly-Kenny for the loan of some more infantry, and on the 22nd the Wiltshires and Bedfordshires arrived, and most of them were marched out next day to Maeder's. As the result of a reconnaissance on the 23rd by Colonel Stephenson of the Essex and Captain De Lisle, French now planned a movement against the Boer positions at Plessis Poort, which covered their communications with the road bridge. The troops detailed for this operation* were assembled near Hobkirk's Farm on the evening of the 24th, and advanced eastwards next morning on the north side of, and partly along, the Bastaard's Nek–Rietfontein ridge, the infantry under Stephenson and the mounted troops under General Brabazon. Owing to the difficulty of the ground the infantry was not in a position to begin an attack till about 2 P.M., and unfortunately Brabazon, whose orders were to work round on the left and get beyond the enemy's flank and rear as soon as the

* 2nd Wiltshires, 4 companies Yorkshires, 2 companies Essex, 2 squadrons 10th Hussars, 1 squadron Inniskillings, De Lisle's M.I., 4 guns "R," R.H.A., and 3 guns 4th R.F.A.

infantry were in position, made no attempt to carry them out. Accordingly when Stephenson at 2.30 P.M. sent forward the Wiltshires to within 800 yards of the Boers, and asked for permission to drive the attack home, as the heights did not appear very strongly held, French reluctantly decided to abandon the attack in view of his very definite instructions from Roberts not to commit his force. The force was withdrawn to Hobkirk's under heavy rifle and shell-fire, the Wiltshires suffering a few casualties in extricating their firing-line. As always, French took care on the 25th that the attack on the left flank should be accompanied by vigorous demonstrations all along the rest of the line. The operation was not entirely wasted, for it served to alarm the Boers, and helped to keep them on the defensive for the next fortnight, during which the greater part of French's force was secretly withdrawn.

Kelly-Kenny's plan for cutting off Stormberg.

An even more important operation than the capture of Plessis Poort had before this been suggested to Roberts by Kelly-Kenny, who had taken over the command at Naauwpoort on the 16th. This was that he should co-operate with French in a sudden forced march across from Arundel to some point on the eastern railway north of Stormberg, and thus compel the immediate retreat of the Boers opposite Gatacre. The plan was sound enough, but Roberts had even bolder forced marches in contemplation, and was not to be tempted away from his main purpose. Accordingly Kelly-Kenny devoted himself during the rest of January to restoring the railway east of Rosmead as far as Theebus, reconnoitring as far as Steynsburg, and covering the march of long convoys of ox-wagons on their way from Queenstown to Orange River. On the eastern flank, except for the formation of the Colonial Division at Queenstown, military operations remained at a complete standstill.

Troops and reinforcements available.

Roberts and his staff, meanwhile, were concentrating their whole energies on the task of creating a field force which should be an adequate instrument for his strategy. Of men Roberts would have no immediate lack. The Sixth Division would be followed before the end of the month by the Seventh. Two cavalry regiments and five batteries R.H.A. were also due during January. Added to the units

already at the front there was thus plenty of material out of which to create a striking force, and, even if its creation and concentration involved weakening certain important points, it would only be for a short time. February would see the arrival of four more brigade divisions of field artillery, of a second siege-train of heavy guns,* of the Burma battalion of mounted infantry, of the colonial second contingents, of several thousand yeomanry and infantry volunteers, and, not least, of eighteen battalions of Militia, a force which Roberts hoped would prove sufficient both in numbers and in quality to set free all the rest of the first line troops for the further advance to Pretoria.† What was wanting was not so much men as an army. The original Army Corps no longer existed, but even if its constituent parts could have been brought together or replaced by fresh forces from home, the War Office sealed pattern field force was not, in Roberts's view, suited to his requirements. It was too cumbrous, possessing neither the strategical mobility demanded by the vast spaces of South Africa and the relative smallness of the forces engaged, nor the tactical mobility essential in order to contend successfully with an enemy like the Boers.

Measures to increase the proportion of mounted troops. The Regular M.I.

The only way to secure tactical mobility was to increase the proportion of mounted men. That proportion, throughout the forces in South Africa, had sunk rather than risen, owing to the reluctance of the home authorities to send out the remainder of the cavalry in England with the reinforcing infantry divisions,‡ and vigorous measures were necessary

* The first siege-train arrived December 26–January 2.

† According to Lord Kitchener (Evidence, Q. 171) the total force, on paper, in South Africa when Lord Roberts landed was 94,600, of whom 51,500 were in Natal and 43,100 in Cape Colony. By the time he marched from Modder River there must have been over 70,000 in Cape Colony, while another 30,000 or more arrived during February. Mr. Wyndham indeed announced in Parliament on February 1 that the total force in South Africa had been 103,000 on January 7 and would before the end of February be 142,800 foot and 37,800 mounted men, or 180,000 in all. The effective fighting strength was, of course, considerably less, and Roberts reckoned it on January 31 as nearly 40,000 men with 120 guns in Natal, and 60,000 with 150 guns in Cape Colony.

‡ See chap. i., pp. 6, 14. The Yeomanry indeed would begin to arrive by the end of January, but they could not be reckoned as fit to take the field for some time after.

to restore the balance and to create a surplus available for Roberts's special purposes. The raising of fresh mounted forces in Cape Colony was one of the first and most obvious of measures. The creation of the Colonial Division in the Eastern Province increased the patriotic self-confidence of loyal colonists, and opened up new sources to recruiting. Equally well judged in its tactful appeal to the patriotic spirit in the colony was Roberts's selection of a personal bodyguard from picked representatives of the different South African corps. Two more regiments raised in Cape Town (Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse) were available or soon would be. Other Colonial corps at present on foot, but consisting mainly of men who knew how to ride, such as Prince Alfred's Guards and the Australian regiment under Colonel Hoad at Enslin, were converted into mounted infantry. Colonel Nicholson, commandant of the police in Rhodesia, was urged to raise further mounted volunteers, and to spare all available police to co-operate in the relief of Mafeking.* Lastly the existing regular mounted infantry was increased by some 3,000 men by the simple process of ordering every infantry battalion to furnish a mounted infantry company. Eight additional battalions of mounted infantry, each of four companies, were raised in this fashion. It was a glorious makeshift, and there need be no disguising the fact that for the first few weeks of its existence the military value of the mounted infantry was somewhat impaired by the difficulty most of the men experienced in climbing on to their saddles or in remaining on them when they got there. The horses, too, were as untrained as the men. For though South African ponies, hardy, acclimatized and frugal of forage, were plentiful all over the colony, the Dutch farmers were unwilling to part with them, and the political situation was considered so critical that Sir A. Milner hesitated to sanction compulsory impressment. The result was that though most of the colonial corps were with difficulty mounted locally, the mounted infantry had to wait, in

* The suggestion in this case seems originally to have emanated from Mr. Rhodes, who on January 13 sent a message to Roberts from Kimberley urging the relief of Mafeking from Rhodesia.

some cases till within a few days of Roberts's start, for Argentine or Australian horses just landed in hopelessly soft condition from a long sea voyage, and quite unfit for hard work even with good riders and horsemasters. None the less the courage that devised the expedient was amply rewarded in the later course of the campaign when the regular "M.I." proved itself the very backbone of the army in the field. By these means and by the withdrawal of French's cavalry from the Colesberg operations, Roberts could reckon on being able by the beginning of February to concentrate at any point a field force comprising not only three or four divisions of infantry and a greatly enlarged division of cavalry, but also two additional brigades of mounted infantry.

The need of an adequate field transport.

Strategical mobility was in Roberts's eyes even more important than tactical mobility, and there was only one way to attain it. The provision of an adequate and mobile transport for the field force was the one measure of preparation which went before all others; how to provide it was the great problem ever before his mind from the day that he left Southampton. That nothing but deficiency of transport could account for the frontal attacks at Magersfontein or Colenso was a conviction which had immediately impressed itself upon him, and had suggested the further inference that something must be radically wrong with the system on which the transport of the original field force was organized. The actual facts, indeed, with regard to those battles, cannot be said to bear out his conclusion.* And in any case we must never forget that the whole of the preceding operations had, owing to the exigencies of the Boer invasion, been undertaken before the original transport organization could be completed. The War Office preparations had included the provision of adequate field transport for an army corps—adequate, at least, for the line of march and style of advance decided upon—and that transport had all reached South Africa by the appointed date, namely, the

* See vol. ii., pp. 321, 392, 426. In both the cases referred to a turning movement was first decided upon as possible, and then abandoned for other reasons than those of transport deficiency alone.

end of December, and by the time of Roberts's arrival was disposed on the lines of communication in readiness for the originally projected advance. Whatever deficiency of transport there may have been at any stage of the earlier operations, or whatever changes Roberts found it necessary to make, the fault lay not with the department responsible for the transport arrangements, but with that fundamental misconception of the strategical problem which was due to the absence of a thinking and planning department at the War Office. At the same time, the fact remains that the original transport for the Army Corps, even with such additions as had been made to it, was inadequate to give to the whole of the now largely increased force the degree of mobility originally intended. Moreover, even that degree of mobility was insufficient for the special effort Roberts required of his striking force. The actual total deficiency in quantity could only be made up by the addition of more ox-transport, as the ordering out of fresh mule-transport would have taken longer than he could afford to wait. On his way out he had urged upon the War Office the necessity of sanctioning a large increase of ox-transport, and only a few hours before his landing, Colonel Bridge, the director of transport at Cape Town, had signed a contract for 300 ox-wagons, in addition to the 700 already in use, to which Roberts added another 200 on the eve of his departure for the front. But for the particular task Roberts had in view a very large proportion of the more mobile mule-transport was considered essential. The wholesale transference to the striking force of mule-transports from units that would not take part in the advance was the necessary consequence, and the working out of this transference, and organizing the transport thus accumulated for the field force, was one of the chief tasks that was to occupy the headquarters staff during the next fortnight.

The regimental system.

A detailed discussion of the highly technical controversy with regard to Roberts's reorganization of the transport system would hardly be in place here, and must be left to be dealt with adequately in a later volume. But it is necessary to summarize briefly the main points at issue. The transport in

South Africa when Roberts arrived was organized on a carefully worked out system, which was an essential part and parcel of the British scheme of mobilization. That system is sometimes called the regimental system, but would be more correctly described as the decentralized or articulated system, its essence being that each field unit—battalion, brigade, division, army corps—has attached to it and is responsible for a corresponding transport unit. Each lower transport unit, as its wagons become empty, replenishes itself from the next higher unit; the highest unit or "supply park" continually sending empty wagons back to the advanced depôt and replenishing itself from there. The supply park, indeed, is the real carrier of the army's supplies, the "supply columns" and regimental wagons being simply distributing pipes, whose object is to enable the issue of supply to adapt itself with the greatest degree of flexibility to the tactical movements of the troops. The merits of the system are obvious. Each unit can move freely for some distance in any direction at a moment's notice, and is directly interested in the efficiency and safety of its own transport. Its chief drawback is that it involves a great deal of unloading and reloading of wagons. And, of course, if there is not enough transport to go round, or if large portions of the field army are demobilized for any length of time, the system tends to be wasteful, unless the responsible staff at headquarters make the fullest use of their powers of temporarily appropriating transport from stationary units and employing it to increase the mobility of those for which special mobility is required.*

The Indian and Sudan systems. A modified form of the latter adopted.

To provide the whole of the supply columns required for the striking force with mule-transport by appropriating regimental mule-wagons from other units, and so to secure the mobility Roberts desired without breaking up the existing organization, was by no means an easy task. But there is no reason to think that it was an impossible one had Roberts or his staff been anxious to make the attempt. That they were not anxious was simply because they were wholly unfamiliar with the working of the British transport organi-

* Orders expressly providing for this had been printed and issued by Colonel Bridge at the opening of the campaign.

zation.* In India transport had always been under the Military Member's Department, and officers on the combatant side were only concerned with its results and learnt little of its internal organization, which, as a matter of fact, was in principle not so very different from the British system. Even Roberts, than whom no general had shown himself more alive to the importance of an efficient transport, seems to have attributed the merits of the Indian transport not to its internal organization, but to the fact that it was under a separate department. This feature he now wished to reproduce, and considered that he could not do better than to entrust the task of making transport departmental to so proved an administrator as Kitchener. Now the transport of which Kitchener had experience was also "departmental," but in a very different sense from the Indian transport. For the comparatively small force, advancing compactly along a single route, which effected the reconquest of the Sudan, no elaborate system of distribution was required, and the units were supplied direct from a single convoy, which was supply park, supply column and regimental transport in one. The system was extraordinarily simple and economical of wagons and labour, but only because the strategical and tactical conditions were also extraordinarily simple. For more complicated operations, involving the spreading out of units over a considerable area, and continual changes in their dispositions to meet the movements of the enemy, it lacked the necessary flexibility, and, however economical at first sight, was almost bound to lead, in the long run, to the neglect, misdirection, and waste of transport. This was the system which, on the day of his arrival, the new Chief of the Staff announced to the bewildered transport officers that he intended to put in force. In its actual working out it was considerably modified in the next few days.

* Nothing can be more typical of the lack of intelligent co-ordination for military purposes between the different parts of the British Empire than the fact that entirely different systems of organization should develop unchecked in armies that have a common purpose and will have to work side by side in any great war. The transport question in South Africa is a good instance of the difficulties that will manifest themselves on a far greater scale in the next great campaign on the frontiers of India.

The reorganization of the transport.

Roughly speaking, all that was done was that the whole of the regimental transport, except water-carts, pack-mules and ammunition-carts, the technical vehicles of the artillery and engineer units, and the barest minimum of ambulance wagons, was impounded,* and combined with the existing supply columns to form mule companies consisting of 49 wagons each,† while the ox-wagons of the supply park remained organized, as before, in companies of 100 wagons. A serious difficulty was the officering of these companies. The regimental transport officers were left behind with their units, and as the new mule companies were nearly twice as numerous as the existing supply columns, a great many officers, some with special transport experience, but not a few without, had to be selected to fill up the Army Service Corps establishment. The supervision of transport and supply on the headquarters staff was placed under a single head, in the shape of Colonel Richardson, hitherto director of supplies, while Colonel Bridge was left to look after transport at the base and on the lines of communication. The reorganization was a heavy task, and only the hard work and determination of Lord Kitchener, assisted after the 18th by Colonel Nicholson, and the loyal assistance of the officers who had hitherto been responsible for the transport organization and now found themselves swept along by a whirlwind of what to them seemed misdirected energy, enabled it to be carried through within a fortnight. By the end of January 28 mule companies and six ox companies were ready, and supplementary companies were formed after the advance began. The new system was again modified after the first experiences of it in the field, and eventually came to differ

* The cavalry, busy round Colesberg, managed to evade the reorganization, and French's dash into Kimberley and heading off of Cronje were carried out with the help of regimental transport.

† The mule company was calculated to carry the baggage and two days' food and forage for a brigade of infantry, in other words, exactly the same as the old supply column and the regimental transport together, so it cannot be said that the new organization materially increased the mobile transport accompanying the troops. The only people who gained were the cavalry, who were allotted a mule company per brigade and still kept their regimental transport.

very little from the system it replaced. In the meantime, the frequent changes involved by its introduction and improvement can hardly be said to have contributed to the efficiency of the transport service. But, in any case, whatever may be said as to the necessity or advisability of the technical side of the reorganization, the cardinal fact remains that Roberts and his staff saw, in a way their immediate predecessors had not seen, that the collection and organization of an adequate and mobile transport was the key to the whole strategical problem; and that in the face of great difficulties they did succeed in getting together a field transport which served their purpose.

New tactical instructions.

If the want of a sound strategical plan, and of the mobility required to execute it, had been the primary causes of failure, as Roberts clearly saw, a cause hardly less important, and one bulking far more prominently at the moment in the public mind, was the lack of skill shown in the actual tactical handling of troops in the attack. It was not a point which Roberts, who had long been an advocate of advanced views on the subject of the changes in tactics necessitated by modern weapons, was likely to overlook. Two circular memoranda, embodying the conclusions confirmed in Roberts's mind by recent experiences, were issued to officers on January 26 and February 5.* In these the Commander-in-Chief laid stress on the uselessness of direct frontal attacks against an enemy like the Boers, and urged the necessity of flank or enveloping movements, or threats against the enemy's line of communications. More extended infantry formations, coupled with all that they imply in the way of greater initiative to subordinate commanders, more skill in the use of cover, the use of enfilading fire, a less stereotyped handling of artillery, more thorough scouting, less overloading of horses, and more careful horsemastership, on the part of the cavalry—in fact most of the leading features of the newer tactical principles which are now gradually beginning to permeate our army—were indicated in these instructions.

A defect which it was too late ever to remedy effectually

* See Evidence, vol. i., Appendix H, p. 532.

was the lack of adequate intelligence. No amount of money poured out after war has begun can secure the knowledge that only comes from the careful and methodical piecing together and collating of infinite details in time of peace, establish those personal relations between the intelligence department and its agents, which are so essential for successful work, or implant throughout the staff of an army that instinctive, insatiable hunger for information without which generalship can only grope in the dark. But when Roberts arrived, even the free spending of money to secure some of the information that ought to have been available long before had not been thought of. This at least could be set right, and Henderson succeeded, immediately on landing, in persuading Roberts to entrust him with sums of money and the means of collecting a staff which had been denied to his less fortunate predecessors. The compilation from such sources as were available of a proper map of the area of war, beginning with the Free State, was taken in hand at once, and the basis was thus laid of a work that was to prove invaluable in the course of the campaign. Not that the map was by any means perfect. But it at least marked an enormous improvement on the previous failure to attempt to supply officers with one of the most essential implements of war.

Intelligence and map-making.

The lack, indeed, of that minute detailed information which cannot be extemporized was from the first destined to have a most important influence on Lord Roberts's decisions, and through a series of modifications to lead to a complete remodelling of his original plan of campaign. No sooner had Roberts begun to work out the details of his projected march east from Orange River than he was confronted by the doubt whether sufficient water to support a large force of men and animals was to be found on the line selected, a doubt which none of his advisers could resolve. It was not a matter in which risks could be incurred lightly. There had been an exceptional drought during the last three months. Failure to secure water on any single day might not only mean the abandonment of the march, but the ruin of the whole laboriously organized transport, and weeks of immobility to follow.

Uncertainty of water supply leads to modification of Roberts's plan which suggests new strategic objective.

Accordingly Roberts reluctantly decided to shift his starting-point and his line of march further north, and, instead of marching straight across from Orange River through Luckhoff and Fauresmith, to start from Enslin or Honeynest Kloof, strike the River Riet at its nearest point, and follow its course up to the railway. The alteration in the strategical plan may seem a trifling one, but its consequences were momentous. For whereas the plan in its original form looked mainly towards the effect produced upon the Boers south of the Orange River, and contemplated opposition mainly from that quarter, the amended plan inevitably brought the whole operation within the zone of attraction of Cronje's force at Magersfontein and Jacobsdal. To pass so close to the main Boer force without attempting to strike a blow at it was contrary to all Roberts's natural instincts. Such a blow, directed against their communications, would immediately force Cronje and Ferreira to abandon their positions and raise the investment of Kimberley, while a subsequent advance on Bloemfontein along the Modder River would draw the Boers at Colesberg and Stormberg back to the defence of their capital. In fact the principle of the move would be the same as that of the move originally planned, but its application as regards the Boer western and southern armies would be exactly reversed, the primary objective of the first plan becoming the secondary objective of the new plan, and *vice versâ*.

Other reasons for change.

Other reasons besides those of pure strategy contributed to recommend the change. When Roberts landed, the immediate danger seemed to lie in the possibility of a Boer advance into central Cape Colony, followed by a general spread of rebellion. To clear the colony seemed the most pressing need, and Roberts acknowledged this not only by sending the Sixth Division to Naauwpoort and by forming the Colonial Division, but also by making the communications of the Boer forces south of the Orange River the primary objective of his flank march. The fortnight which had intervened had shown that the Boers were too sluggish, and the intending rebels too half-hearted, to make use of their opportunities in Cape Colony. On the other hand, it had brought home more closely to Roberts's mind the enormous

importance the fate of Kimberley possessed in the estimation of South Africans, loyal and disloyal alike. If the speedy relief of Ladysmith had been assured, Kimberley might well have waited a little longer, but after Spion Kop the need for making sure of at least one of the besieged towns, for speedily gaining a universally recognizable success, and averting a terrible moral catastrophe, seemed all the stronger.

The change finally decided upon after Spion Kop. The concentration.

Up to the morning of January 26, Roberts was still inclined to favour the south-eastward march along the Riet. That afternoon, after pondering the full bearing of Buller's reverse, he finally made up his mind in favour of the change, and at once proceeded to put the new plan into execution, communicating his general intentions to the Secretary of State by cable on the 27th. On the 28th, French, whom he had summoned down from Colesberg, reached Cape Town, and with him the Commander-in-Chief spent a day in discussing the reorganization of the new cavalry division, the great part he intended it to play in his operations, and the steps necessary for its concentration in rear of Methuen's position without drawing the attention of the Boers to its removal from Colesberg. The concentration and distribution of the whole force destined to take part in the march to Bloemfontein, on whose rapidity and secrecy everything depended, was now worked out by the staff in conjunction with Colonel Girouard, the director of railways, and every train move for the next week, and the starting-point of every single unit, arranged before Girouard left for Modder River to superintend its execution. For over a week this tremendous work of concentration went on busily. The Seventh Division, under Lieutenant-General Tucker, a level-headed, capable officer, best known in the army for a forcible picturesqueness of speech which recalled the old days of "campaigning in Flanders," was now landing, and, together with additional batteries of field and horse artillery, was sent up to Modder River or points on the line to the south of it.* The cavalry

* Lord Roberts originally selected Honeynest Kloof as one of the principal points of concentration and the starting-point of his march, but on February 3, hearing that the water supply there was wholly inadequate, he ordered Girouard to transfer the concentration point to Enslin-Graspan,

round Colesberg, including the useful New Zealanders, were, regiment by regiment, withdrawn from their positions, their places being scantily filled by detachments from Clements's infantry brigade and by the newly mounted Australians from Enslin; and were sent round to Orange River. Here both they and the mounted infantry were mostly detrained in order to relieve the fearful congestion on the railway, the cavalry being marched up to Modder River, and the mounted infantry concentrating at Orange River. Kelly-Kenny's troops on the line from Naauwpoort to Steynsburg were also withdrawn, their place being taken by the first batch of seven Militia battalions which were just beginning to arrive. As Clements's brigade was required at Colesberg, the Essex and Yorkshires were withdrawn from there and sent round to Modder River, while two more battalions from the line of communications were brigaded with them to enable Kelly-Kenny to complete his division. The accumulation of transport and supplies on the western railway had already begun some time before, but an enormous amount still remained to be done. By February 8 everything was in readiness for the start. When the great distances and the limited capacities of the railway are taken into consideration, the energy and ability shown by Girouard, by Mr. Price, the traffic manager of the Cape Railways, and by all their subordinates in carrying out this great concentration, without a hitch, deserve the highest praise. Whatever defects the British Army displayed in the higher departments of strategy and tactics, the work of moving and of supplying the troops, on which, to a large extent, everything else depends, was, throughout

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a task of no small difficulty, involving the laying down of extensive additional sidings within twenty-four hours. As a matter of fact this change only affected the infantry. The cavalry remained at Modder River, and, in any case, the water difficulty made it necessary for mounted troops and transport to remain at Modder River and Orange River up to the last moment. Even so, it was only due to the previous strenuous exertions of the R.E., under Elliott Wood's directions, in developing the water supply by diamond drill boring that the stations along the line could be used as much as they were. As it happened the preliminary massing of most of the force at Modder River helped Roberts's plans by contributing to Cronje's belief that a direct attack on Magersfontein was in preparation.

the war, carried out in a fashion with which the army and the nation had every reason to be satisfied.

Successful secrecy of the concentration.

Not the least successful feature of this gigantic piece of scene-shifting was the impenetrable curtain of secrecy behind which it was carried out. A few of Roberts's staff, two or three of the senior generals affected, the irreducible minimum of railway officials, perhaps a dozen persons in all, were privy to the concentration orders, and even of these few could have felt certain, till the very last moment, which way the army would move when once it left the railway. Neither the troops themselves, nor the population of Cape Colony, not even Cape Town, where, as a rule, secret information leaked out with surprising rapidity, had the slightest inkling of what was taking place. The despatch of Kelly-Kenny to Naauwpoort, the addition of fresh infantry to French, the attempt to restore the railway connection with Stormberg, and the formation of the Colonial Division, had all tended to create the impression that Roberts's intention was to force the passage of the Orange River at Norval's Pont and Bethulie. The military censorship attempted to strengthen this impression by encouraging the publication of press telegrams hinting at a great concentration near Naauwpoort. The Boers at Colesberg were completely taken in, and as a result of their alarmist appeals Steyn not only sent them considerable reinforcements of Free Staters from various points, but also put such pressure upon Kruger and Joubert that, in spite of the imminence of Buller's next attack, 750 Heidelbergers were brought round from Natal to Colesberg in the beginning of February.* As for Cronje, he seems to have discovered nothing except that Modder River and the line in rear were being considerably reinforced, and to have drawn no inferences from this beyond a belief that another attempt might before long be made to assault the Magersfontein intrenchments.

Boer activity in the west. Roberts orders construction of fort at Koedoesberg.

The only direction, indeed, in which the Boers showed any trace of initiative was in the extreme west of the theatre of war, where they now began to resume the activities temporarily interrupted by Pilcher's sudden raid to Sunny-

* See p. 312.

side. Boer emissaries had crossed the Orange River and were busy preaching rebellion at Upington and Prieska. The whole of north-western Cape Colony was in a state of ferment and only waiting for a small commando to furnish the nucleus of a general revolt. A scheme for an expedition to this vast, half desert region was laid before Cronje by a prominent rebel from northern Cape Colony, L. P. Steenkamp of Venterstad.* Cronje approved, and appointing Steenkamp head-commandant of the rebel forces destined to be raised, sent him off on January 26 with Commandant Liebenberg—created general for the occasion—two guns, and some 200 burghers. For the moment, however, the expedition did not get beyond Douglas, where its leaders, alarmed probably by news of the British occupation of Prieska,† decided to halt and await events for a few days. Meanwhile reinforcements in small driblets kept constantly moving from Cronje's camp to join them, while their reconnoitring parties, pushing east, began showing themselves in the Vetberg within twenty miles of Belmont, and at points even nearer to the railway—Rochfort Boyd's force having before this fallen back on Richmond. From Roberts's point of view it was very desirable to put a check on these movements, which might easily develop into a most serious menace to the safety of the whole western line of communications. Orders were sent to Wood at Orange River to push back the Boers from the Vetberg and clear the district, and on the night of February 2 Roberts telegraphed to Methuen to despatch at once a force of all arms under General MacDonald to Koedoesberg Drift, twenty miles west of Modder River camp, to prevent the Vetberg Boers making their retirement that way, and to superintend the construction of a small fort to hold 200 men, which should command the passage of the drift. The object of this fort was to prevent the Boers from using in future what was erroneously believed to be the only easy drift on the Lower

* See vol. ii., pp. 365, 371.

† Prieska was occupied for the second time on January 27 by Colonel Alderson with 6 guns and 600 mounted men from De Aar, of whom 300 were to be left as a garrison. The necessities of the concentration, however, proved too strong and the whole force was recalled on the 28th.

Riet River, and so to put a check on the sending of reinforcements of men or ammunition to the incipient rebellion south of the Orange River. It was, in other words, to play the same useful, if inconspicuous, part that the Zoutpan's Drift fort played to the east of the Orange River camp. But Roberts no doubt also had in his mind the advantage which such a movement to the west, which might be interpreted as evidence of an intention of marching to Kimberley by way of Koedoesberg, would have in screening his own preparations.

Feb. 3–4. MacDonald marches to Koedoesberg.

Taking the Highland Brigade, two squadrons of the 9th Lancers, the 62nd Field Battery, and the 7th Company, R.E., MacDonald moved off early on the 3rd and bivouacked that night at Fraser's Drift, eight miles down stream. A hot and trying march of thirteen miles brought the force to Koedoesberg Drift at 2 P.M. next day, the cavalry driving out a small party of Boers, who made off northwards. The drift, a picturesque willow-shaded depression hidden away below the surface of the dusty veld, takes its name from a great hill which extends for nearly two miles along the right bank of the river between it and Painter's Drift, some three miles down stream. Dominating the country for a score of miles round, the Koedoesberg more particularly commanded the drift and its approaches at long rifle-range. MacDonald saw at once that a redoubt placed anywhere near the drift would be exposed to fire from the Koedoesberg, as well as from rising ground within 1,200 yards on the left bank. On the other hand a fort either on the Koedoesberg or on the rising ground opposite could easily be cut off from its water supply. MacDonald telegraphed to Methuen advising the abandonment of the project, but was ordered to carry out his instructions. He accordingly decided to construct a redoubt on a small knoll close to the drift on the right bank.

Feb. 5–6. Arrival of De Wet.

The news of MacDonald's march only reached Magersfontein that afternoon. De Wet at once sent off 100 men under Commandant Du Plooy, who reached the foot of the Koedoesberg late that night. Ascending the hill at daybreak, their patrols met those of the 9th Lancers, who at once gave the alarm. MacDonald, who was watching the construction

of the redoubt below, forthwith ordered the working party of 300 men to drop their tools and rush up the hill, following them up by three more companies of the Highland Light Infantry, and sending round the Lancers to threaten the Boer left flank. Deep re-entrants in its south-western and north-eastern faces almost divide the Koedoesberg in two, the eastern portion being considerably higher, especially at its northern and southern extremities. The British were in time to take up positions on the eastern half commanding both the southern re-entrant and the narrow neck between the two halves of the hill, and strengthened them in the course of the morning. In the afternoon De Wet arrived with another 300 to 400 men, and took them up to the northern and western crest of the hill. MacDonald now sent the Black Watch and two guns to occupy a hill to the north-east of the Koedoesberg and a farm near it, so as to protect his right flank. At night-fall the Boers withdrew, owing to lack of water, some three miles north to a long ridge which sweeps round from beyond Painter's Drift towards Kameel Hoek and Magersfontein. De Wet sent back for reinforcements, which arrived in the shape of 200 men under Commandants A. P. J. Cronje and Froneman, with a gun under Albrecht, at 4 P.M. on the 6th. Meanwhile, MacDonald's presence at Koedoesberg was already exercising its effect upon the Boers south of the Riet, and parties of them began making their way back by Painter's Drift.

Feb. 7. Boers attack vigorously.

During the night Albrecht got his gun on to the western half of the plateau of Koedoesberg, and at daybreak opened on the British breastworks, now held by the Seaforths, at 1,600 yards' range. At the same time Froneman, with a small party, worked along from the west in the broken ground between the Koedoesberg and the river, while De Wet attacked from the northern side. MacDonald put Hughes-Hallett of the Seaforths in command on the hill and reinforced him with two companies of the Highland Light Infantry, at the same time telegraphing to Methuen for further reinforcements. By 11 A.M. the engagement had become pretty vigorous, and eventually four companies of the Black Watch were sent up from the farm to support Hughes-Hallett. The artillery

under Major Granet had before this been brought over to the left bank to try and silence Albrecht's single gun. At mid-day the 9th Lancers reported that the Boers were in force at Painter's Drift, and two guns, together with two companies of the Argyll and Sutherland Highlanders, who held the left bank, were sent in support. At 1 P.M. two guns were sent back to the farm to search the northern crest. The Boers were now held at all points.

Arrival of Babington; his excessive caution.

On receipt of MacDonald's message Methuen at once despatched Babington with a scratch cavalry brigade.* Starting at 10 A.M. and marching along the north bank Babington arrived within three miles of the Koedoesberg before 2 P.M. The engagement was evidently in full progress, though it was not easy to determine exactly which was friend or foe. Had Babington at once made for the drift, sending a galloper ahead to inform MacDonald, he might have been in time to co-operate usefully. Had he gone straight for the northern end of the hill he might even have scored a great success by cutting off the larger portion of De Wet's force. Instead of this he remained inactive for nearly two hours, trying to get into heliographic communication with MacDonald, and sending out cautious patrols. About 3.30 P.M. one of these, meeting some of the 9th Lancers, brought back some news of the situation. Babington now decided to move across the Boer rear. As he did so the detachments on the Boer left galloped away north-west, under a vigorous shell-fire from the horse artillery, leaving the flank and rear of the Boers on Koedoesberg completely exposed. Babington ordered the Household Cavalry to pursue. But they were not quick enough. De Wet on Koedoesberg had seen what was happening, and taking some forty or fifty men, all he could get hold of at the moment, had galloped to a scrub-covered ridge, just in time to pour a rapid volley into the cavalry as they were checked by a wire fence a few hundred yards beyond. It was now almost dark, so Babington recalled his men and fell back to the drift.

If Babington was inactive and over-cautious, MacDonald

* "O" and "R," R.H.A., Household Cavalry, 16th Lancers, squadron 10th Hussars, squadron 12th Lancers, two troops Scots Greys.

Failure to cut off the Boers, who abandon their position in the night.

hardly seems to have been sufficiently on the look-out for a force whose coming he expected. He made no arrangements for meeting Babington or communicating his wishes to him. It was not till after 3 P.M. that he heard of Babington's approach, and it was not till after 4 P.M. that he discovered that the cavalry were not coming to the drift but going round the hill. Before this he had sent up the rest of the Seaforths to Hughes-Hallett and had ordered him to prepare for a general advance across the hill at 6 P.M., hoping that by then the cavalry would be in a position to cut off the Boer retreat. Instead of now accepting the situation and sending an officer to explain his views or going himself, the only message he sent was one asking Babington to come to the drift, which the latter, who was just starting off the Household Cavalry, not unnaturally disregarded. It was now too late to do anything, and the plan for encircling the enemy on Koedoesberg was put off till next morning. But the Boers had been thoroughly alarmed by Babington's move, abortive though it was, and not only evacuated the Koedoesberg and Painter's Drift that night, but decided not to reoccupy them. Believing the whole object of the move to Koedoesberg to be an attempt to get through to Kimberley, they now took up an extended position on the long ridge to the north and awaited the British advance. MacDonald and Babington, meanwhile, set their troops in motion to encircle the Koedoesberg early on the 8th, but soon discovered that their bird had flown. The total British casualties in this operation had been about sixty, including three officers killed. The Boer loss was under thirty.

Other operations in combination with Koedoesberg.

The rest of the combined operations had, meanwhile, proved equally inconclusive. By February 6 Colonel Broadwood, to whom Wood had entrusted the clearing of the Vetberg and district, had under him at Richmond some 1,500 men, including Roberts's Horse, Pilcher's and Alderson's mounted infantry, and Rochfort Boyd's original force, and advanced to Thornhill. On the 7th he marched as far as Sunnyside without finding the enemy, who had already withdrawn to Douglas or across the Riet in consequence of MacDonald's move to Koedoesberg. Accordingly he returned

to Richmond on the 8th. But inconclusive though they were at the moment, both Koedoesberg and the march to Sunnyside played, in the event, a most useful strategical part in concentrating Boer attention to the west of the railway. Moreover, Koedoesberg helped to establish in the minds of Cronje and his burghers a false feeling of security with regard to the possibility of a flank march for the relief of Kimberley, while Broadwood's move successfully deferred the Prieska expedition for a week or more, and prevented it from becoming a menace till after the main issue of the campaign had already been decided.

Roberts's departure for the front. Feb. 6. Dangers of the position.

On the evening of February 6 a brougham left Sir A. Milner's door, and half an hour later two passengers quietly boarded the northward mail at Fish River Station just outside Cape Town. They were Roberts and Kitchener. The stealth of their departure was due not only to the desire to prevent the news being transmitted, through disloyal channels, to the enemy, but also to fears of a possible attempt to wreck the train, a fact which throws an interesting sidelight on the anxieties of the situation in Cape Colony. The headquarters staff had gone earlier in the day. The period of preparation was at last over, and the time for action had come. What would action bring with it? Nothing in the study of military history is so difficult as to recover the true perspective of events on the eve of some great decision, undisturbed by the knowledge of what actually followed. Nor is it in criticising failure alone, but no less in the recognition of success that the difficulty lies. Success often seems so simple and obvious that we forget the work and effort that has insured it, or the courage that has ventured unhesitatingly along the right path to victory, heedless of the phantoms and chimeras peopling the fog of war on every side. The preceding pages may have given some idea of the labour and organization involved in collecting so many thousand men, animals and wagons, at a few railway sidings 600 miles from the base at Cape Town. But they have hardly indicated the military difficulties and dangers of the position. The entire force assembled at the front now depended on the safety of the single railway behind it, and would so depend

until the whole operation was successfully accomplished—the Boers drawn out of Cape Colony, and the new line of communications across the Orange River established. Yet to the east of that railway, barely 60 miles from De Aar, lay over 7,000 Boers, with only Clements's skeleton force and their own ignorance between them and the complete destruction of Roberts's cherished plans. To the west the whole vast region between the railway, the Orange River and the sea, was reported to be simmering with rebellion, and no troops could be spared to cope with it. Even in the rest of Cape Colony it was by no means certain that the Dutch inhabitants would not rise if they realized how the forces south of the Orange River were reduced, and how great was the opportunity which would present itself to them of cutting off the flower of the British Army in the interior of the subcontinent.

Roberts's confidence. His memorandum to Milner.

Roberts knew all this, but, greatly daring, was content to take the risks. For he also knew that none of these dangers equalled the danger of not securing speedy victory under the most favourable tactical conditions. Besides, his sure instinct told him that, once he assumed the initiative and pushed the war into the enemy's country, all Boer schemes and activities elsewhere would have to give way to the imperious necessity of staying his advance. On the eve of his departure he expressed these views in the form of a reply to a memorandum by Sir A. Milner on the measures to be taken for safeguarding the colony. This reply, though in the particular instance based on a partial misconception of the High Commissioner's purpose and attitude, was, nevertheless, an admirable exposition of the principles of sound strategy.* It was not as if the risk was one which would have

* See Evidence of War Commission, vol. i., pp. 529, 530. Sir A. Milner's minute was, as a matter of fact, a criticism of the wasteful method of leaving stationary defensive forces dumped along the railways, and a suggestion for a definite and scientific organization of the troops left behind in Cape Colony, or due to arrive in the next few weeks, with a view to enabling the smallest possible number of them to cope with the still serious possibility of rebellion, and to freeing the Commander-in-Chief at the front from all anxiety on the score of his communications. It contained no hint of the desire, which Lord Roberts seems to have read

to be run very long. Fully 30,000 additional troops were due to arrive in Cape Colony before the end of February. And as an additional precaution, more especially in view of Buller's failure at Spion Kop, Roberts had already, on January 28, applied for an eighth infantry division * and for the long-delayed cavalry brigade. No special arrangements, as suggested by Sir A. Milner, for the organization of mobile forces to protect the communications and suppress rebellion, were made by the Commander-in-Chief, who, no doubt, felt that it was better to run a certain amount of risk than to spend a day more on organization. But General Forestier-Walker was instructed to confer with the High Commissioner and endeavour to do all in his power to meet his views. General Brabazon, who had been brought back from Colesberg, was now left at Cape Town with instructions to organize and train the yeomanry as they arrived. Roberts also, before leaving, strongly urged, though without effect, that martial law should be imposed at the seaports to prevent the movement of undesirables and spies up and down the coast.

Feb. 8. Roberts's arrival at Modder River. Serious news from Natal and Kimberley.

Two days of hot and dusty travelling, the last few hours past camp after camp of newly-arrived troops, brought Roberts to the wilderness of tents and railway sidings and transport wagons and loose, burning sand, into which ten weeks of military occupation had turned the once pleasant environs of Modder River Station. The news that there awaited him was not calculated to diminish his anxieties. Vaal Krantz had been abandoned by Buller in direct disregard of his instructions. Such a step, following after Colenso and Spion

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into it, that the advance into the Free State should be delayed, or the striking force weakened, for the sake of passive precautions against problematical dangers. The real difference in the attitude of the two men may be summed up by saying that Milner regarded Cape Colony as a potential area of hostilities, which it would require a carefully thought out permanent organization to suppress, while Roberts looked only to the guarding of a line of communications for which any troops, not immediately required at the front, would suffice. Immediate success justified Roberts's optimism, but subsequent events proved the soundness of Milner's contention.

* Astonishing as it may seem, this request, as far as it concerned the infantry division, was at first disregarded, and the sending of the division was only sanctioned, after a second request, at the end of February.

Kop, could only mean that the direct relief of Ladysmith was impossible, and indirect relief might well prove too late. However much Roberts discounted for Buller's natural disappointment, he could hardly have remained unaffected by the despairing telegram which announced that the fate of Ladysmith was only a question of days. Even more disquieting was the news from Kimberley. Ever since the end of January the citizens had been getting more and more restless under the effects of shell-fire and reduced rations. The unexpected opening of a siege gun on February 7 had completely upset their nerves, and on the 8th Kekewich considered himself justified in reporting that the situation was becoming serious. On the 9th matters came to a head, and Rhodes informed Kekewich that unless definite information as to Roberts's intentions with regard to the relief of Kimberley were given him, he would in two days call a public meeting of the citizens to consider the seriousness of the situation. Next day a further request for information, laying stress on the importance of relieving Kimberley, was signed by Rhodes and all the leading citizens and handed to Kekewich for transmission to Roberts. Kekewich seems to have assumed that Rhodes deliberately intended to advise the citizens to surrender, and on the 9th communicated this impression to Roberts. Roberts signalled to Kekewich on the 10th to represent to Rhodes and the Mayor "the disastrous and humiliating effect of surrendering after so prolonged and glorious a defence," and to add that active operations would commence on the morrow, and that many days could not possibly pass before the relief would be accomplished. At the same time he authorized Kekewich to make the fullest use of his powers under martial law to forbid any meeting or to put Rhodes under arrest. The message at once produced the desired effect. Rhodes replied that surrender had never been thought or spoken of, and no doubt the friction between him and Kekewich led the latter to put too unfavourable a construction upon his language and attitude, and to attribute to unpatriotic cowardice what was nothing more than ungovernable impatience and irritation at being kept in the dark. But to Roberts the situation cannot but have appeared

terribly critical. Those critics who hold that Roberts allowed the actual relief of Kimberley to bulk too largely in his final plan should always keep in mind the seriousness of the situation as regards both Kimberley and Ladysmith as it presented itself to him during these days at Modder River, and their wonder will be not that he allowed his plan to be modified so much, but rather that he persevered in it so confidently and undeviatingly in the face of dangers and difficulties calculated to unbalance the soundest judgment and dismay the stoutest courage.

Hurried organization of the units. Feb. 8–10.

Whether Kimberley seriously influenced the form of Roberts's plan or not, one thing seemed certain, that every hour's delay involved danger to the fate of Kimberley, and, perhaps, of the whole campaign. A great part of the force was still entirely unorganized in any formation higher than the regimental unit—one of the consequences of the secrecy of the concentration—and a few days more spent in getting brigades and divisions together and in selecting their staffs were certainly desirable. But time was too precious. Units and staffs would have to be pieced together as best they could, and would have to find themselves after the march started. By scraping together every single cavalry unit in the country, including even the cavalry normally assigned to the infantry divisions, three cavalry brigades were formed, and their command entrusted to Colonels Porter,* Broadwood and Gordon. Seven horse artillery batteries were assigned to the cavalry division and distributed among the three brigades. The mounted infantry, organized in two brigades, each of four battalions, under Colonels Hannay and Ridley, were also to be attached to the division, which they were to join on the march. The whole mounted force was to be under French. The latter part of the organization was, however, never carried out—for reasons that will appear in the narrative—and the only mounted infantry which really formed part of French's division was a provisional brigade of regular mounted infantry

* Originally Babington was appointed to command the 1st Cavalry Brigade, but on the 9th he was replaced by Porter, Roberts considering that the caution and slowness displayed by him at Koedoesberg and on previous occasions necessitated his supersession.

and colonial troops, under Colonel Alderson, while the rest of the mounted troops were not regularly organized till March 4. How hurried Roberts's start was may be judged from the fact that, though the Cavalry Division was nominally formed on February 8, not one of its brigadiers was able to reach his brigade till after the march began. Of infantry there was enough available to complete four divisions. The First Division, under Methuen, consisted of the Guards and 9th Brigades, now placed under Generals Pole-Carew and C. W. Douglas, and the 20th and 38th Field Batteries, together with four 5-inch howitzers and some naval guns. This division was destined to remain at Modder River in order to contain Cronje, and afterwards to occupy Kimberley and secure the western line of railway. The Sixth Division, under Kelly-Kenny, was completed by the creation out of miscellaneous battalions of an eighteenth brigade, commanded by Colonel T. E. Stephenson of the Essex Regiment, and by Colonel McDonnell's brigade division R.F.A. and two naval 12-pounders. The Seventh Division, under Tucker, was intact as regards infantry, being, indeed, the first division which succeeded in taking the field exactly as it had been sent out. Its artillery complement was formed by the transference from Methuen of Hall's brigade division, which had done such good work in the advance to Modder River. Lastly, on February 10, a ninth division was created by putting together the Highland Brigade, under MacDonald, with a new nineteenth brigade, under Colonel Smith-Dorrien of the Derbyshire Regiment, and was entrusted to General Colvile. In the way of artillery, it was provisionally equipped with the 82nd Battery, borrowed from McDonnell's brigade division, the 65th (howitzer) Battery, and two naval 4·7-inch guns. Of the 28 companies of mule-transport organized up to date, 21 had been concentrated for the advance, sufficient to allow a company for each brigade and division of the force. Of the 600 ox-wagons of the supply park, 125 were loaded with reserve ammunition and 475 with ten days' supply of food and forage for the marching force, whose total strength, including non-combatants, amounted to, roughly, 37,000 men, 14,000

Brigadier-General T. E. Stephenson, C.B.,
Commanding 18th Brigade.
Photo by Deale, Bloemfontein.

Brigadier-General Sir H. A. MacDonald, K.C.B., D.S.O.,
Commanding Highland Brigade
Photo by Lafayette, Dublin.

horses, 12,000 mules and 10,000 oxen. Insignificant as this force may seem compared with those that can be moved and kept together in fertile and densely populated countries, yet, in view of the conditions that prevail on the African veld, to have collected it at one point ready to march and fight for a fortnight away from all communications was a feat which only the most absolute steadfastness of purpose at the head, and the most devoted co-operation on the part of every subordinate, could have rendered possible.

Start postponed to 11th. Roberts addresses the cavalry.

Immediately on arrival, Roberts had ordered in Babington and MacDonald from Koedoesberg Drift and Broadwood from Richmond. That same afternoon orders were issued that the move was to begin on the 10th with the concentration of the Cavalry Division, the mounted infantry and the Seventh Division, at Ramdam, twelve miles east of Graspan. But the start had to be postponed a day in order to allow the first 200 wagons of the supply park and the mule-transport of the Seventh Division to come up from Orange River, which they had only just received the order to leave. Everywhere along the line, meanwhile, the camps were full of bustle and animation. The heat was terribly oppressive, and the work that had to be got through in those few days, alike by officers and men, would have been exhausting at any time. But all worked with a will and with the cheerful confidence that the long, inglorious period of inaction was over, and that the day of great things had come. On the evening of the 10th Roberts and Kitchener visited the camp of the Cavalry Division, where everything was now in readiness for the morrow's start. The brigadiers and commanding officers were assembled, and Roberts addressed them as follows :—

"I have asked General French to call you together as I want to tell you that I am going to give you some very hard work to do, but at the same time you are to get the greatest chance cavalry has ever had. I am certain you will do well. I have received news from Kimberley from which I know that it is important the town should be relieved in the course of the next five days, and you and your men are to do this. The enemy have placed a big gun in position and are shelling the town, killing women and children, in consequence of which the civilian

population are urging Colonel Kekewich to capitulate. You will remember what you are going to do all your lives, and when you have grown to be old men you will tell the story of the relief of Kimberley. My intention is for you to make a detour, and get on the railway north of the town. The enemy are afraid of the British cavalry, and I hope when you get them into the open you will make an example of them."

Final form of Roberts's plan.

It was, indeed, upon French and his cavalry that the whole success or failure of Roberts's plan depended, in this, the final stage of its evolution. The substitution of the movement against Cronje's communications for the original march eastward had brought with it certain elements of difficulty. It involved the crossing of two considerable rivers within a few hours' distance of the enemy's main body. Everything, therefore, depended on the rapidity of the turning movement. And if the purely strategic reasons for speed had not been sufficient in themselves, the situation in Kimberley seemed such that every hour's delay might well be fraught with disastrous consequences. No forced march by the whole army could make sure of seizing the drifts in time. The only way, as Roberts had already decided before he left Cape Town, was to use the cavalry, with its complement of mounted riflemen and horse batteries, as an independent strategic unit, and to send it ahead to secure the crossings and to relieve Kimberley. The rest of the force would follow, occupying point after point as the cavalry pushed forward. The ever-present consideration of water supply allowed little choice of route. Ramdam, the only spot with abundant water between the railway and the Riet, was selected as the point through which all the columns, horse and foot, were to pass, in fact as the real point of concentration of the whole force, and, indeed, owing to the hurry of the start, as a flying base where units could be made up and fitted out with commanders, guns, or transport as they went through. From there the cavalry was to push across the nearest drift on the Riet and then head due north for the Modder and Kimberley. The infantry divisions were to follow successively, but to incline inwards on crossing the Riet so as to occupy Jacobsdal, and regain touch with the First Division

at Modder River. The mounted infantry, who had already marched from Orange River to Ramah Spring, some ten miles east, on the night of the 9th, were to cover the right flank of the initial movement, in case of Boer reinforcements hurrying up from Colesberg through Fauresmith, and then to support the cavalry, and be available, if necessary, to reinforce rapidly any part of the extended line of troops stretching in a great curve from Modder River to Kimberley.

Discussion of the plan.

In its final form, Roberts's plan, with its bold adaptation of the methods of the cavalry raids practised so successfully in the American Civil War to the purposes of combined operations on a large scale, was eminently fitted to meet its author's purpose. Not only were the initial movements, if discovered, calculated to puzzle and mislead the enemy with regard to their direction and design till that design was more than half accomplished, but the first step, the relief of Kimberley, would leave the army disposed in a thoroughly flexible formation, equally ready to destroy Cronje if he waited, or to cope with any move he might make in counter-stroke or flight. That Cronje would sit on at Magersfontein with his communications severed, and await an enveloping attack from the whole British force, including Methuen's division and the garrison of Kimberley, was, to Roberts, unthinkable. Only two alternatives seriously presented themselves to his mind at the time. The first, and least probable, with opponents such as the Boers had shown themselves to be, was that Cronje would, during the march, attempt to fall upon Methuen or upon the flank of one of the infantry divisions. In this case the other divisions could rapidly wheel inwards in support, while the cavalry, closing in upon Cronje's rear, might complete the envelopment and insure the destruction of his whole force. The other, and more likely, alternative was that Cronje, realizing his danger, would at once extricate himself from the narrowing semi-circle of troops, make his way round on one side or the other of Kimberley, and then, together with the besieging forces under Ferreira, fall back eastwards on Boshof, eventually moving south again to take up new positions in order to cover Bloemfontein. In this event French at Kimberley

would be admirably posted to intercept his convoy, harass his retreat, and keep in touch with his subsequent movements. The infantry, meanwhile, would be ready either to support French or to march up the Modder directly on Bloemfontein, and, having the advantage of the shorter line over Cronje, would give him no time to select or create a strong position. The criticism has often been made that Roberts should have neglected Kimberley and have devoted his whole attention to crushing the Boer army in its trenches at Magersfontein. Judging after the event, the criticism is not altogether devoid of force. But it assumes that Roberts, without previous experience of Boer generalship, should have counted upon Cronje's slowness and lack of perspicacity. At the time it was more natural to suppose that unless the attack was purely frontal, in which case all the tactical advantages would be on the Boer side, Cronje would simply withdraw out of its reach, leaving Roberts to strike a heavy blow at the empty air. Roberts never supposed that Cronje would allow himself to be caught sitting, except on his own terms, and therefore based no plans on that supposition. What he reckoned on was to compel Cronje to move in such a fashion that he was bound sooner or later to come into collision, voluntary or involuntary, with the momentum of the British advance. The relief of Kimberley, however desirable in itself, and however prominent in Roberts's own thoughts, was from this point of view but the first step in converting a paralysing stalemate into that free motion which is the true opportunity of bold generalship. It was not that he shirked the tactical issue. But he was determined that wherever and whenever that issue was decided, it should be on ground of his own choosing and under conditions less favourable to his enemy than those which British generals had hitherto been contented to accept. Whatever risks he was prepared to run, the risk of defeat in the field was not among them. This was the essence of his policy and the secret of the confidence which inspired him as he now launched his force on the great enterprise on whose issue hung the fate of the war.

THE FOLLOWING TABLE GIVES THE COMPOSITION AND STRENGTH OF LORD ROBERTS'S FIELD FORCE.

The organization of cavalry and mounted troops is the one actually in force from February 13 onwards. The strengths are those given in Lord Roberts's despatch (No. 2) of February 16. For the units and strength of the force that marched into Bloemfontein, see the diagram near the end of the volume.

FIRST DIVISION.—Lieut.-General Lord Methuen.

1st (Guards) Brigade—Maj.-Gen. R. Pole-Carew.		*9th Brigade*—Brig.-Gen. C. W. Douglas.	
3rd Grenadier Guards	915	1st Northumberland Fusiliers	617
1st Coldstream Guards	965	½ 1st Loyal N. Lancs.	447
2nd Coldstream Guards	921	2nd Northamptonshire Regt.	850
1st Scots Guards	953	2nd K. O. Yorkshire L.I.	840
18th Bearer Co.		1st Bearer Co.	
18th Field Hospital		19th Field Hospital	

Divisional Troops.

20th and 38th Batteries, R.F.A.	353	17th Field Co. R.E.	
4 5-inch. Howitzers, 37th Battery, R.F.A.	160	Balloon section	
2 4·7 Naval guns		1st Division Field Hospital	

SIXTH DIVISION.—Lieut.-General T. Kelly-Kenny.

13th Brigade—Maj.-Gen. C. E. Knox.		*18th Brigade*—Brig.-Gen. T. E. Stephenson.	
2nd E. Kent Regt.	786	2nd R. Warwickshire Regt.*	850
2nd Gloucestershire Regt.	735	1st Yorkshire Regt.	936
1st W. Riding Regt.	750	1st Essex Regt.	787
1st Oxfordshire L.I.	614	1st Welsh Regt.	970
7th Bearer Co.		6th Div. Field Hosp. Bearer Co.	
Field Hospital		No. 3 Section Cape Field Hosp.	

Divisional Troops.

76th, 81st, 82nd Batteries, R.F.A.	523	38th Field Co. R.E.	
2 12-pdr. Naval guns		Field Hospital	
Ammunition column	83		

* Followed up after Poplar Grove; till then at Orange River Bridge.

SEVENTH DIVISION.—Lieut.-General C. Tucker.

14th Brigade—Maj.-Gen. Sir H. Chermside.		*15th Brigade*—Maj.-Gen. A. G. Wavell.	
2nd Norfolk Regt.	814	2nd Cheshire Regt.	830
2nd Lincolnshire Regt.	858	1st E. Lancashire Regt.	910
2nd Hampshire Regt.	700	2nd S. Wales Borderers	961
1st K. O. S. Borderers	950	2nd N. Staffordshire Regt.	900
Bearer Co.		Bearer Co.	
Field Hospital		Field Hospital	

Divisional Troops.

18th, 62nd, 75th R.F.A.	523	9th Field Co. R.E.	
Ammunition column	123	Field Hospital	

NINTH DIVISION.—Lieut.-General Sir H. E. Colvile, K.C.M.G.

3rd (Highland) Brigade—Brig.-Gen. H. A. MacDonald.		*19th Brigade*—Brig.-Gen. H. Smith-Dorrien.	
2nd Black Watch	649	1st Gordon Highlanders	900
1st Highland L.I.	950	2nd D. of Cornwall's L.I.	836
2nd Seaforth Highlanders	703	2nd Shropshire L.I.	886
1st A. and S. Highlanders	819	Royal Canadian Regt.	925
Cape Vol. Bearer Co.		7th Divn. F. H. Bearer Co.	
3rd Co. Field Hospital		No. 1 Section Cape F. H.	

Divisional Troops.

83rd, 84th, 85th R.F.A.*	523	7th Field Co. R.E.	
65th Howitzers, R.F.A.	243		
2 Naval 4·7, 2 12-prs.			

CAVALRY DIVISION.—Lieut.-General J. D. P. French.

1st Cavalry Brigade.—Colonel T. C. Porter.		*2nd Cavalry Brigade.*—Colonel R. Broadwood.	
2nd Dragoons (Scots Greys)	438	10th Hussars	458
6th Dragoon Gds. (Carabiniers)	464	Composite Household Cavalry	625
1 sq. 6th Dragoons (Inniskillings)	464	12th Lancers	500
1 sq. 14th Hussars		"P" and "G" Batteries, R.H.A.	371
1 sq. N.S.W. Lancers		Ammunition column	66
"Q," "T," "U" Batteries, R.H.A.	551		
Ammunition column	107		

* Joined after Poplar Grove. Till then Colvile used 82nd R.F.A.

CAVALRY DIVISION—*continued.*

3rd Cavalry Brigade.—Colonel J. R. P. Gordon.		*M.I. Brigade.*—Colonel E. A. H. Alderson.	
9th Lancers	418	1st Bn. M.I.	413
16th Lancers	540	3rd Bn. M.I.	460
"O" and "R" Batteries, R.H.A.	371	Roberts's Horse	550
Ammunition column	142	2 sq. Kitchener's Horse	200
		Queensland M.I.	275
		2 cos. New Zealand M.R.	204
No. 9 and 12 Bearer Cos.		Rimington's Guides	150
No. 6 and 9 Field Hospitals			

REGULAR M.I.—Colonels O. C. Hannay and C. P. Ridley.

2nd Battalion	440	6th Battalion	460
4th „	450	7th „	450
5th „	430	8th „	430

Other Mounted Units.

Nesbitt's Horse	250	C.I.V. Mounted Infantry	250
2 sq. Kitchener's Horse	200	Grahamstown 1st City Vols.	200
N.S.W.M.I.	120		

TRANSPORT.—Colonel W. D. Richardson (Colonel W. G. Nicholson).

21 mule companies, 1,134 wagons, etc., 11,000 mules, 2,700 drivers, etc.
6 ox „ 600 „ 9,600 oxen, 1,320 „

APPROXIMATE NUMERICAL STRENGTHS (including Non-Combatants).

First Division	7,400
Sixth Division (excluding Warwicks)	6,700
Seventh Division	7,900
Ninth Division	7,400
Cavalry Division (including Alderson's M.I.)	8,000
Other Mounted Troops	3,600
Transport	4,000
Total	45,000

Of these some 37,000, representing roughly 30,000 combatants, took part in Roberts's invasion and marched through Ramdam.

Distribution of Troops on February 10.

At Modder River: Cavalry Division (minus sundry units at Ramah Spring); 1st Division; 6th Division (H.Q. 6th Division

and part of 13th Brigade leave for Enslin); 9th Division (H.Q. and 3rd Brigade, 19th Brigade still scattered guarding communications between Modder River and Orange River).

At Enslin: 14th Brigade.

At Graspan: 7th Division H.Q. and 15th Brigade.

On road from Richmond to Belmont: Broadwood's column (afterwards bulk of Alderson's M.I.).

At Ramah Spring: M.I. (Hannay); Carabiniers, sq. 14th Hussars, details Inniskillings; 2 sq. Kitchener's Horse; N.S.W.M.I.; N.Z.M.R.; details Rimington's Guides.

Of the transport: six mule companies at Modder River, three at Graspan-Enslin; 200 ox-wagons supply park at Belmont; 50 ox-wagons reserve ammunition at Modder River; the rest of the transport was still at Orange River.

CHAPTER XIII

THE GREAT FLANK MARCH

Feb. 11. The start. French's plan for crossing the Riet.

At 1.30 A.M. on the 11th French's eager troopers rose from their dusty bivouac and stood to their horses in the bright moonlight. It was nearly 3 o'clock, and the moon had set, before they marched off. Their horses' heads were turned due south, straight away from the beleaguered city, which seemed to beckon them back in perplexed appeal, as the pale beam of its searchlight restlessly swept the dark horizon. A ride of twenty-two miles brought the head of the column at 10 A.M. to the whitewashed homestead, broad muddy *pan*, and abundant wells of Ramdam. The Seventh Division had marched in just before them from Enslin and Graspan, at which points the Sixth Division arrived by rail later in the day. At 2 P.M. French issued his orders for the morrow. The 3rd Cavalry Brigade was to reconnoitre towards Waterval Drift, the nearest point on the Riet, which here makes a broad square-ended loop to the west, and was to cross over at once if unopposed. If opposed it was only to make a feint at crossing, while French himself, with the 1st Cavalry Brigade, both mounted infantry brigades, and the bulk of the Royal Horse Artillery, forced a passage at De Kiel's Drift, some five miles upstream, at the southern corner of the loop, the 2nd Cavalry Brigade making another feint still farther to the east. A personal reconnaissance in the afternoon confirmed French in the general outlines of the plan he had already worked out from the map. Meanwhile, Gordon had joined his brigade, and at 8 P.M. Broadwood marched in and took over his new command, while his column, pending the arrival of Hannay and Ridley, was now assigned to Lieut.-Colonel Alderson, commanding the 1st Mounted Infantry.

The supply park, however, which was supposed to be under Broadwood's escort, had been unable to get in that night, and had stopped some five miles short of Ramdam.

Non-arrival of M.I. at Ramdam. Origin of delay.

More serious was the non-arrival of the mounted infantry and the Carabiniers from Orange River, whom French undoubtedly expected to join him at Ramdam that evening. The orders communicated to Hannay had been to bivouac near Ramah on the night of the 9th, march next day to Roodepan (16 miles), clearing away any Boers that might be hovering on the flank, and arrive at Ramdam (13 miles) on the 11th. Without waiting for Ridley or the 8th M.I., who had not yet arrived, Hannay had started sending the whole column * across the narrow and difficult railway bridge over the Orange River at noon on the 9th. At 2 P.M. he received an order postponing the movement for twenty-four hours. This was countermanded an hour later, but meanwhile the troops had returned to their bivouacs, and it was almost sunset before a fresh start was made. The consequence of this piece of bad staff work at headquarters was that the force only reached Ramah at 7 A.M. next day, while its transport was not all in till nearly midday. Now Hannay's programme for the 10th included, not only the march to Roodepan, but also an attack upon the Boers known to be in the hills in front of Wolvekraal farm, some ten miles east of Ramah. These were only estimated at some 150 out of the total of 500 Fauresmith burghers under Jacobs known to be in this south-western corner of the Free State. But Hannay, puzzled perhaps by previous contradictory orders, seems to have considered their presence, added to the lateness of his transport, and the bad horsemanship of most of his force, sufficient reason for halting the day at Ramah.† At dusk he sent out De Lisle with some 1,300 men,‡ with orders to "drive through" the hills next morning.

* 2nd, 4th, 5th, 6th, 7th M.I.; 2 sq. N.Z.M.R.; 2 sq. Kitchener's Horse; Carabiniers; 1 sq. 14th Hussars; details Inniskillings and Rimington's.

† Whether a message reporting this delay was ever sent, or how, if sent, it was not communicated to French, does not appear.

‡ 5th and 6th M.I.; N.Z.M.I., N.S.W.M.I. (picked up at Ramah), and 2 maxims of 6th D.G.

De Lisle's fight at Wolvekraal.

At daybreak on the 11th De Lisle set to work, and soon found that the hills were more strongly held and more difficult to attack than had been supposed. He reported to Hannay that an assault without artillery would be costly and doubtful. Hannay sent the 2nd M.I. and Kitchener's Horse, and subsequently the 7th M.I., to support, but on arriving on the ground himself at 11 A.M. concurred in De Lisle's view and, as the convoy was already past the hills, ordered a retirement. But some of the mounted infantry were already so involved at close ranges with the Boers, who by now had brought up the best part of Jacobs's commando and a gun, that De Lisle was unable to disentangle them till nightfall. He then followed the convoy to Roodepan, which he did not reach till midnight. The rawness of the newly raised mounted infantry was very apparent in this little skirmish.* Still, unsuccessful as it was, it served its main object of covering the convoy and helping to create the impression in the Boer mind that the British march was directed towards Luckhoff and Fauresmith. It was under this impression that President Steyn at once ordered a contingent of Heidelbergers, under Field-Cornet Spruyt, who were on their way round from Natal, to Luckhoff, which they reached two days later.

Cronje sends De Wet and Andries Cronje to stop French.

All tents had been left standing at Modder River, and the march of the cavalry had been entirely unnoticed by Cronje at Magersfontein. It was not till after midday that he learnt that a considerable British force had arrived at Ramdam. Absolutely convinced that the main British army opposed to him could not move any distance from the railway, and that the relief of Kimberley could only be attempted by another direct attack, Cronje concluded that he had to deal with a mere demonstration of the kind with which Babington's previous reconnaissance over the same ground, and MacDonald's and Broadwood's more recent expeditions to the west, had made him familiar, or at the most with a raid whose objective might be Fauresmith or the railway in rear of Norval's Pont. Given this not unnatural view of the situation the measures he took cannot be considered inadequate.

* Casualties: 4 killed, 25 wounded and 11 prisoners.

There were already some 400 burghers under Lubbe at Jacobsdal. He now sent Christian de Wet with another 450 men and two guns to head off the British in case they should attempt to make for Koffyfontein on the way to Fauresmith, following him up early next morning by 400 more under his brother Andries Cronje. These reinforcements, indeed, included almost all his really well-mounted men. De Wet and Lubbe got to within a few miles of Waterval Drift that night.

Feb. 12. French crosses Riet at De Kiel's Drift.

Meanwhile, French decided to push across the Riet without delaying to wait for Hannay. At 2.30 A.M. the Cavalry Division marched off, and, after halting on the way for the interval between moonset and dawn, moved on to Waterval Hill, nearly four miles south-west of Waterval Drift. Rimington's Scouts had, before dawn, reported the country clear as far as the river, and French accordingly concluded that he could take his whole force over at Waterval Drift. But the Boers had been up early too, and were now crossing the river at Waterval Drift in order to reconnoitre towards Ramdam. At 6 A.M. the cavalry patrols were fired on, and soon the Boers disclosed themselves in considerable force along the Langhoek hills, some three miles north of Waterval Hill, and on the kopjes nearer the drift, from which latter direction they presently brought a gun into action. This was quickly silenced by "R" and "O" Batteries under Colonel Eustace, and before long the Boers fell back across the drift. They now took up a position on the kopjes on the right bank, where they were reinforced by the rest of De Wet's column and their remaining gun. But before this French had made up his mind to revert to the scheme outlined in his orders of the previous day; in other words, to confine himself to a feint on Waterval Drift, and to cross with his main force at De Kiel's. So while Gordon demonstrated against Waterval Drift, the 1st Brigade and mounted infantry were turned about and, under cover of Waterval Hill, held by Broadwood, swung round till they faced east in a broad line with three batteries in rear (9 A.M.). In this formation they moved slowly towards De Kiel's, but as soon as French saw that the advanced scouts had got near the river without drawing fire, he ordered the

whole line to make for the river at a gallop. The Boers at once hastened up to dispute the passage, but before they had arrived in any effective numbers, Roberts's Horse had crossed at a ford a mile below De Kiel's, and the rest of the force had taken up positions commanding the crossing. They then attempted a counter-movement on the British right flank from the kopjes immediately south of De Kiel's Drift, but were driven away by Broadwood's brigade, which, with Eustace's guns, had meanwhile come round on the right of the line. By noon both crossings were completely held. De Wet, with the bulk of his men, abandoned the now useless positions opposite Waterval, and galloped across the British front towards Blaauwbank, upstream of De Kiel's, offering an excellent target for the guns if the senior officer on the spot had shown any enterprise. The whole of the division now crossed at De Kiel's Drift, and proceeded to rest and wait for its transport. Men and horses alike were exhausted by the terrible heat of the day, and no pursuit of De Wet was possible. Two squadrons of 10th Hussars were, however, sent some six miles north-east to report on water facilities and to cut the Jacobsdal–Koffyfontein telegraph. They successfully did the latter, and encountered a few Boers, but failed to find water. Neither they nor the 12th Lancers, who patrolled some distance upstream, managed to locate De Wet's force, which had long ago crossed the river and taken up positions on the Winterhoek hills covering Koffyfontein. Had the Hussars stayed out a little longer they could hardly have failed to have come across A. Cronje's force, which had not been up in time for the morning's operations, and now came straight down the Jacobsdal–Blaauwbank road, arriving at Winterhoek at dusk. And so, partly owing to the exhaustion of his horses, but even more to the inadequate training of his cavalry in the art of scouting, French lost touch with his enemy, whom he in fact believed to have made off to the north or north-east.

Other movements on 12th. Roberts at Ramdam; Kitchener at De Kiel's.

While the first serious obstacle on the way to Kimberley was thus being successfully dealt with by French practically without fighting, the rest of the great movement was developing in rear. The Seventh Division, followed by its transport,

left Ramdam at 7 A.M., began to arrive at De Kiel's (16 miles) at 2 P.M., and crossed over in the course of the afternoon, leaving most of the transport on the right bank. Marching through the burning midday heat the unseasoned troops suffered intensely, and large numbers of men and officers had to be left exhausted by the way. The cavalry transport only received orders to move from French by field telegraph at 10.45 A.M., after he was certain where he would cross, with the result that it was blocked till 4 P.M. by Tucker's transport, and only reached De Kiel's towards midnight. The unfortunate cavalry consequently could draw no supplies till the next morning. Meanwhile the Sixth Division* marched into Ramdam as Tucker marched out, making room in its turn at Enslin and Graspan for the preliminary assembling of the Ninth Division. At 2 P.M. Hannay's column got into Ramdam, having left Roodepan at 9 A.M. The supply park reached Ramdam early and pushed on that same evening for De Kiel's. Roberts himself with the Headquarter Staff left Modder River by train in the morning, and reached Ramdam at noon, sending on Kitchener in the afternoon to confer with French at De Kiel's. Kitchener arrived at 7 P.M. to find a vast confused jumble of transport struggling for access to the drift. Miles and miles of wagons were still coming up in rear to add to the overcrowding. The one crossing available† was so difficult that it was late in the night before even the Royal Horse Artillery batteries and half their ammunition columns were over. Kitchener at once saw that to attempt to pass the whole army through De Kiel's Drift might paralyse the whole momentum of the march. He sent back word to Ramdam suggesting that part of the transport and the mounted infantry should be ordered to Waterval, where the drift, if not better, could not be worse, and asked French to occupy it before starting for the Modder.

* The Sixth Division artillery, under Lt.-Col. McDonnell, only left Modder River for Enslin that evening, and, marching through the night, reached Ramdam at 4 A.M. on the 13th. The 82nd Battery was, however, left behind to serve as artillery for the Ninth Division.

† The drift which Roberts's Horse had first crossed by was impossible for wagons.

Feb. 13. Departure of the cavalry from De Kiel's.

The next day's march was the critical one for the opening phase of Roberts's campaign. Not only were there some twenty-five miles of almost waterless sandy veld between De Kiel's and Ronddavel Drift, the nearest ford on the Modder, but the direction of the march was bound to disclose Roberts's hand, and to indicate the objective which up to this moment had been so skilfully concealed. An early start was very desirable. But this the transport difficulty made impossible, and it was nearly 10 A.M. before the division had secured a meal and the two days' supplies for men and horse which it was to carry on the saddle, and was ready to start. In the interval the 9th Lancers dispersed a few Boers from Waterval Drift, and Roberts himself arrived and inspected the splendid body of horsemen on whose march so much depended. The bulk of the mounted infantry was still severed from the division, and the Carabiniers and New Zealanders, who had just come up after a night march from Ramdam, were left behind to bring on the transport when it should get across. But even so, the four brigades presented an imposing spectacle as they rode off, at first in line of brigade masses, then in line of squadron columns at deploying intervals, the guns between the intervals, and the mounted infantry and ammunition columns in rear, the whole front eventually covering nearly five miles. Roberts may well have felt confident that they would not fail to achieve his purpose.

De Wet watches the start. His lack of nerve.

The same thought, though coloured with foreboding rather than confidence, seems to have forced itself upon another spectator of that scene. From the Winterhoek hills De Wet watched the broad cavalry line swinging northwards, and behind it the host of horse and foot, guns and wagons, swarming round De Kiel's Drift. For the first time he realized that it was not Koffyfontein that French was heading for, but the Modder. The situation called for immediate action. But the impression of irresistible force seems to have completely paralysed De Wet's activities. He still had some 800 well-mounted men with him,* but instead of

* A certain number of the force that came out from Magersfontein seem already to have gone back to their laagers, or even to their homes,

riding off with these, resolved to hamper and harass the comparatively slow and unwieldy cavalry column, to check its progress at every line of kopjes, and eventually to co-operate with Cronje in bringing it to a standstill, he contented himself with sending some 250 men under Lubbe to follow the movements of the cavalry, and, as the telegraph line was cut, with despatching Sergeant Scheepers with a highly alarmist message to Cronje. The rest of his force he withdrew to Koffyfontein, where he remained inactive for two whole days, hoping to pick up some unconsidered trifle in the shape of a rearguard or convoy when the army should have passed. That Cronje was deprived during these critical days of the most effective part of his forces was entirely due to De Wet's lack of nerve and failure to grasp the strategical situation.

The cavalry march to Modder River.

The first enemy encountered by the cavalry was a small party under Commandant Pretorius on its way to reinforce De Wet. These opened fire on the left brigade (Gordon's) and then hurriedly fell back on Jacobsdal to report that the British were marching on that place, thus helping to increase Cronje's mystification. But, so far from pursuing, French had swung out of their way to the right towards Blaauwbosch Pan (eight miles), where a squadron of Kitchener's Horse was left to guard the scanty water supply till the rest of the force came up. The short halt at Blaauwbosch Pan, however, had enabled Lubbe, on the right, to draw level with the cavalry, and some of his men now rode forward to the hills north-east of Rooidam (thirteen miles), whence they fired upon the 1st Brigade (2 P.M.). They were quickly dispersed by the Horse Artillery, the hills occupied, and the march resumed. But more Boers showed themselves on the flank, and French, not knowing whether he might not be dealing with the main body of the enemy with which he had lost touch on the previous day, and afraid lest they should attempt to wedge themselves in between him and the river, promptly resolved

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on the 12th and 13th. The figures here given are considerably in excess of those put down in De Wet's 'Three Years' War,' which is, however, wholly untrustworthy in matters of detail, and in conflict with his own contemporary despatches.

to defeat their intentions. Suddenly wheeling his long line half-right, he bore away to the north-east. His object in this was to make the enemy believe that he was heading for Klip Kraal Drift, nearly ten miles east of Ronddavel Drift, and thus keep them well out to the right, while all the time his left wing was nearing his real objective almost as rapidly as if he were marching directly upon it. The principle of the manœuvre was as old as Leuthen and Mantinea. Its bold and skilful application on this occasion calls for praise none the less because we now know that Lubbe's men were too few to have stopped the march. For an hour and a half French kept on his new course at a rapid pace. Horses were now falling fast, exhausted by the terrible heat and dust of the march. At last, five or six miles away on the left front, appeared the dark green line of trees that marked the course of the Modder, with a few white tents gleaming beyond. Once more French swung his line round, and ordered his brigadiers to make full speed for the river. Forward the cavalry trotted as best they could, while the gun teams staggered wearily far behind, man and beast alike filled with one thought only—the cool muddy water that was the immediate prize of success. Even now French, in case of serious opposition, had ordered Gordon to make for Ronddavel Drift as a feint, while Broadwood with the centre brigade, followed by Alexander, was to force the crossing at Klip Drift, two miles upstream. The small detachments of Free Staters camped at the drifts were too bewildered with sudden fright to contest the crossing, and bolted precipitately. The cavalry at once seized both drifts and occupied the line of low kopjes beyond, thus securing an extensive bridge-head of considerable natural strength. By 5 P.M. French was able to report the successful accomplishment of his task.* The abandoned laagers were found to be full of forage and supplies of every kind, and the tired-out troops, after slaking their thirst, threw themselves down to a well-earned repast; while, during the next few hours, the mounted and dis-

* The cable-cart had kept up with the force, but a veld fire which had sprung up behind had burnt the wire, and the message was eventually sent by despatch rider.

mounted jetsam of the column straggled wearily into camp through a blinding dust storm. The loss in horses had been very heavy, especially in the artillery and ammunition columns, something like 500 being dead or unfit to march. Considering the fearful heat, the absence of all water for the horses, and the enormous weight of the British cavalry equipment, this march to Modder River was a feat of which the cavalry had every reason to be proud.

Other movements on 13th.

For the rest of the army, meanwhile, the main business of the day consisted in getting the transport across the Riet. All day long, and well into the morning of the 14th, a great cloud of choking dust hung over De Kiel's Drift as the wagons ploughed axle deep down and up the steep sandy banks. The mules alone could never have got their loads over had not the sturdier oxen of the supply park been called upon to help. Pending the crossing of its transport the Seventh Division remained at De Kiel's. Part of the transport assigned to the cavalry, and a section of the supply park, were sent round early to Waterval Drift, whither the rest of the supply park followed after dark. Here the same dusty struggle with the drift went on all that day and the next. Hannay's mounted infantry came in from Ramdam (twelve miles) at 9 A.M., having left at 4 A.M.; and the Sixth Division, which had started for De Kiel's but had received orders diverting it to Waterval while on the march, at 1 P.M. Meanwhile the component elements of the Ninth Division, with the naval guns and C.I.V. Mounted Infantry, were marching into Ramdam and there finally constituting themselves a unit. The whole of Roberts's army was now on the move and cut adrift from the railway.

Sixth Division hurried forward. Movements of 14th.

The delay at the drifts had created a great gap between the cavalry and the rest of the force, which not only rendered French's position insecure, but prevented a further advance on Kimberley. Accordingly Roberts rode over to Waterval Drift in the evening and asked Kelly-Kenny if his men were fit to push on that same night to Wegdraai, 11 miles farther on the way to Jacobsdal, and half way from Waterval to Ronddavel Drift. Kelly-Kenny was ready enough, but to make quite sure that all that relentless hustling could do to hurry

COLONEL T. C. PORTER, C.B.,
COMMANDING 1ST CAVALRY BRIGADE.
Photo by C. Knight.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL J. R. P. GORDON, C.B.,
COMMANDING 3RD CAVALRY BRIGADE.
Photo by Elliott & Fry.

BRIGADIER-GENERAL R. G. BROADWOOD, C.B., A.D.C.,
COMMANDING 2ND CAVALRY BRIGADE.
Photo by Dickinson & Foster,

BRIGADIER-GENERAL C. P. RIDLEY, C.B.,
COMMANDING 2ND MOUNTED INFANTRY BRIGADE.
Photo by Duffus Brothers, Cape Town.

COLONEL O. C. HANNAY,
COMMANDING 1ST MOUNTED INFANTRY BRIGADE.
KILLED PAARDEBERG, FEB. 18, 1900.

on the march should be done, Roberts ordered Kitchener, who had already been over at Waterval Drift during the afternoon expediting matters, to accompany the column. This was how the Sixth Division got in front and came in for all the hardest fighting of the great march.* At 1 A.M. on the 14th Kelly-Kenny started, taking with him the 4th and 5th M.I., and reached Wegdraai at 10 A.M. The march was somewhat slowly carried out owing to the careful reconnoitring on which, in spite of Kitchener's impatience, Kelly-Kenny insisted. From Wegdraai Colonel Henry with the 4th M.I. reconnoitred right into Jacobsdal, less than five miles away, without meeting the enemy. But the telegraph office had apprised Cronje of his entry. A small force was despatched from the head laager at Brown's Drift, and attacked the mounted infantry on its way back to Wegdraai, Henry being wounded in the skirmishing which ensued and lasted most of the afternoon. At 5 P.M. Hannay, with the 2nd and 6th M.I., reached Wegdraai, having left the 7th M.I. and other details with Roberts's headquarters, which had moved to Waterval in the morning. Meanwhile Porter had left De Kiel's at 12.30 A.M. with the cavalry baggage, reserve ammunition, and part of its supplies,† and, marching slowly, reached the Modder by 4 P.M., taking over and reorganizing his brigade,‡ while the New Zealanders were attached to Alderson. The Seventh Division with its transport started at 6 A.M., and, marching very easily, covered the 13 miles to Wegdraai by 2 A.M. on the 15th. The Ninth Division reached Waterval Drift at noon, with its mule transport, and spent the rest of the day crossing with the help of the supply park oxen. The naval 4·7-inch guns caused especial difficulty and required as many as 400 men on drag-ropes to assist their

* The original intention had been for the infantry to march north from De Kiel's Drift, but the doubt as to the water supply, added to the difficulty of getting all the convoy across at De Kiel's, had decided Roberts on the evening of the 12th to substitute the Wegdraai route, *i.e.*, to follow the Riet as far as possible before striking across.

† The rest, going *viâ* Waterval, arrived at the Modder on the 15th after the cavalry had left, and only rejoined at Paardeberg.

‡ Into two four-squadron regiments, one containing Scots Greys, Inniskillings and N.S.W. Lancers, the other Carabiniers and 14th Hussars.

teams of 32 oxen. The 50 ox-wagons of reserve ammunition got through next, and it was only after dark that the hard-worked teams of the supply park could begin to haul their own wagons over.

Cronje's measures on 13th and 14th. He still regards French's movement as a feint.

Throughout the 13th rumours of every sort had been flying about the Boer laagers at Magersfontein. To these Cronje, as was his wont, paid little attention. The first authentic news of any sort that reached him was brought by the fugitives from Ronddavel Drift. Their story and the sound of French's guns convinced him quickly enough. He at once ordered Commandants Froneman and De Beer, with some 800 men, to attack the presumptuous force that had come within half-a-dozen miles of his own headquarters, and to drive them away. Had Cronje's subordinates possessed more of his own dour spirit they might well have made the development of Roberts's plan a difficult matter. But instead of making a prompt attack on French's exhausted cavalry that night, the two commandants contented themselves with taking up a defensive position along a series of low kopjes and ridges, barring any further advance in the direction of Kimberley or of the main laager. Reinforced by a couple of Albrecht's guns on the morning of the 14th, they shelled French's bivouac, and carried on some half-hearted and ineffectual skirmishing against the British positions during the day. That French should have reached the Modder was no doubt a complete surprise to Cronje. But of the real significance of his appearance there the Boer leader seems, not unnaturally perhaps, to have had no inkling. How little importance he assigned to it may be judged from the fact that he ordered back some reinforcements which Ferreira had sent over from Kimberley on hearing of the seizure of the drifts. Convinced that the bulk of the British forces could not move far from the railway, he assumed that Roberts was simply feinting at his flank in order to entice his men out of the Magersfontein trenches, and to divert his attention from Modder River Camp or Jacobsdal, from one of which directions the main attack was bound to come, and might come at any moment. His force was already dangerously scattered. Several hundred men were out to the west with Liebenberg

and Breytenbach; De Wet and Andries Cronje with his best mounted burghers were completely lost out of sight more than thirty miles away; another 800 were now facing Klip Drift. Barely 5,000 men were left to hold the extended Magersfontein lines, separated by nothing but a few thousand yards of open veld from the British camp. To weaken these still further before he really discovered where the British infantry were massing seemed to Cronje neither safe nor necessary. And, apart from specific reasons, all the instincts of his slow, stubborn nature rose in arms against the idea that the trenches, so long held, so laboriously improved, might have to be abandoned without fighting.

Feb. 14th–15th. Sixth Division and M.I. march to Modder. Cronje hides his laager.

On arrival at Wegdraai, Kitchener had sent forward a staff officer to French to inform him that he intended moving on to join him with the Sixth Division early next morning. French sent back to ask if the move could not be executed that same night, as he did not wish to lose another day before starting for Kimberley. Kitchener at once replied in the affirmative, and at 5 P.M. the Sixth Division resumed its march, taking on the 2nd and 6th M.I., but leaving two battalions of the 13th Brigade, the 76th and 81st Batteries, and the rest of the mounted infantry to hold Wegdraai till the arrival of the Seventh Division, and then to come on with the convoy. In spite of fatigue, darkness, and a heavy rain storm, the infantry plodded on bravely, and reached Ronddavel Drift by 1 A.M. on the 15th, having done their 24 miles in the 24 hours. Hannay with the convoy, the rest of the infantry, and the 4th and 5th M.I. and guns, left Wegdraai at 2 A.M. and arrived at 7 A.M., men and horses of the mounted infantry much done up owing to their mutual inexperience of each other's ways. Meanwhile the movement of the Sixth Division had been reported to Cronje at a late hour in the night. This was the first information of any value that his defective scouting arrangements had as yet secured for him. It was quite enough to shake his preconceived convictions as to the British plan and to cause him serious alarm. A hurried *Krygsraad* was held, the only upshot of which was that it was decided, at 2 A.M. on the 15th, to move the whole head laager from its exposed

position at Brown's Drift into the sheltered bed of a dry *pan* on the farm Bosjespan, two miles back from the river, a move which was successfully carried out before daybreak.

French decides to break through Boer position.

For French the decisive moment had now come. So far he had met with no serious resistance. But this time his path was completely barred across by the enemy, to whom he had perforce been obliged to give some 36 hours to collect from their laagers close at hand. What their strength might be he could not tell, and had decided not to care. Come what might, he was resolved to break through to Kimberley that morning. How to do it he was not quite certain, though he already had a pretty shrewd idea. Between Klip Kraal Drift and his present position the river made a considerable sweep to the north. On the eastern side of the bend the right bank was guarded by a series of kopjes, and their general line was continued for some five or six miles north-westwards beyond the angle of the bend. These the previous day's reconnaissances had shown to be occupied. But between these and the kopjes and ridges running north-eastwards from Cronje's laager, which he also knew to be held in some strength, a broad, shallow valley ran up from the angle of the bend towards Abon's Dam and Kimberley. This, he suspected, was the weakest part of the Boer line; at any rate, this was the point he meant to try.

Feb. 15th. Cavalry move out from Klip Drift.

By 8.30 A.M. on the 15th the Sixth Division had taken over all the outposts on the kopjes covering the two drifts, and an hour later the cavalry were formed up under cover in column of brigade masses, facing upstream, with the guns on their left flank, Gordon leading, followed by Broadwood, Porter, and Alderson. Of the ammunition columns, the one attached to Colonel Davidson's brigade division, which was drawn by mules, was the only one to join in the march; the others had been stripped of their horses to remount the broken-down gun teams. At 9.30 A.M. French ordered Gordon to advance under cover some two miles upstream till close to the head of the bend and then turn north in the direction of Abon's Dam. Before leaving camp himself French discussed his intentions with Kitchener, who promised to follow him up with every available man and gun next day. He then rode

off at the head of Broadwood's brigade, which followed about a mile behind Gordon. Meanwhile the Boers on the eastern ridges disclosed their positions with most gratifying precipitancy by opening a heavy rifle-fire on Gordon's reconnoitring detachments. At the same time two or three guns began shelling the cavalry from the north-west. Sending Eustace's batteries ("O" and "R") to deal with the Boers to the east, French ordered Rochfort to take his brigade division ("Q," "T," and "U") on to the rising ground to the left and silence the Boer guns. The Boer gunners had been waiting for this. The moment Rochfort's guns emerged from cover and came into action the shrapnel was bursting over them, and in a few minutes they had suffered over twenty casualties. But the Boer guns were quickly located and silenced, and the horse artillery were presently most usefully supported by the two naval 12-pounders under Lieutenant Deane, R.N., which had been taken to pieces and carried bodily up the steep kopje above Klip Drift, and by the 76th and 81st Batteries, R.F.A., which now brought a vigorous fire to bear on the right flank and rear of the Boer positions. Davidson's batteries ("G" and "P") were also ordered up to Rochfort's support.

The cavalry charge.

French called up his brigadiers and pointed out the position to them. The force was advancing into a semicircle of fire. To the right and left, from the two converging lines of kopjes, the fire was heavy. Straight in front down the open valley it was less, but whether because the ridge was weakly held, or only because the head of the British column was still out of range of the low ridge which ran across the valley some two miles away, was a mere matter for conjecture. French briefly expressed his opinion that the ridge was not strongly held, and without further ado ordered Gordon to extend his brigade into line and take the ridge at a gallop. Broadwood was to follow with his brigade and guns. Porter and Alderson were to bring up the rear with the rest of the batteries, which were ordered to keep up their fire to the last moment. Gordon immediately moved forward, opening out his four available squadrons into double line, extended to five yards intervals between the files, the 16th

Lancers (Major Frewen) on the left, and the 9th Lancers (Major Little) on the right. Then at a thundering gallop the brigade swept forward, almost lost from view in a whirling cloud of dust, which rose still higher and thicker as Broadwood's brigade galloped after, barely half a mile behind. The Boers at once opened a tremendous fire from both flanks, while some of them hurried down from the kopjes to reinforce the thin line of riflemen posted across the head of the valley. In breathless suspense the rest of the British force watched the magnificent spectacle, dreading every moment to see the front line waver and fail under the stream of fire, and peering anxiously through the dust for the dead and wounded strewing the veld. But the long lines swept on unwaveringly, and only here and there could a fallen trooper or riderless horse be seen. The speed of the charge, the open order, the cloud of dust, and the admirable support of the batteries in rear, all contributed to render the Boer fire ineffective. Before the seemingly irresistible wave of horsemen the Boers scattered and fled in dismay. A few were too late, and a score were speared by the Lancers or taken prisoners, while some adroitly slipped through the gaps in the British lines before escaping to a flank. Ordering the rest of the division to follow, French galloped after Broadwood's brigade. Meanwhile the 16th Lancers, after reaching the ridge, had been diverted to the left in the hope of cutting off the Boer guns. But Albrecht had already withdrawn these after a few parting shots at Rochfort's batteries as they limbered up. The pursuit was not pressed, and the whole division now collected at Abon's Dam (11.50 A.M.), where a small amount of water was found for the men, though not for the horses. The pride of triumph beamed on every face. French, the hero of this great day, was not sparing of his congratulations to the brigadiers and to the men who had so spiritedly carried out his bold design.

Novel character of Klip Drift charge.

The charge at Klip Drift marks an epoch in the history of cavalry. With other cavalry charges of former wars it has little in common, save the "cavalry spirit"—the quick insight that prompted it, the instantaneous decision that launched it against the enemy, the reckless, dare-devil confi-

dence that carried it through. In its form it was something wholly new. It was not a sudden charge upon an enemy already fully engaged with other troops or retiring in disorder from the field. It was no instance of shock tactics, for there was nothing opposed to it on which a shock could take effect. Nor was its success in any way connected with the particular weapon carried by the cavalry. It was simply a direct frontal attack, aimed at the centre of the enemy's line with the object of breaking through it and crumpling it up. And it was only made possible by the very tactical conditions that had made these self-same frontal attacks so futile and costly when attempted by infantry. The thin line of unseen riflemen, with its wide gaps covered by converging fire, which had proved itself so unapproachable to the slow, short-winded foot-soldier, availed nothing against the rushing speed and sustained impetus of the wave of horsemen, too swift to afford an easy aim, too scattered to be affected by unaimed fire, able to cross the whole bullet-swept zone without once checking for breath. This was the secret French had divined. By making use of it he took, in a few minutes, and with less than a score of casualties,* a position which with infantry or dismounted cavalry would have required the best part of a day, and have probably involved considerable losses. Unfortunately, during the South African War the experiment was never again repeated on a large scale, and the cavalry were only employed to turn positions, not to storm them. But the part played by cavalry in the main attack, where conditions of ground are favourable, is one that will grow in importance in the wars of the future, and in tracing the development of this new function of the mounted arm the military historian will take his starting-point in the great charge that relieved Kimberley.

French rides on to Kimberley.

French was now right in rear of Cronje's head laager, which lay perfectly defenceless, crowded together in the saucer-shaped depression of a typical Free State *pan*, with only four or five miles of open ground between. Had he

* Two killed and 17 wounded, of whom 4 were in a small party of 7 scouts under Lieut. Hesketh, 16th Lancers (killed), who gallantly rode ahead of the charge to reconnoitre for barbed wire.

been aware of this, and realized how completely the Boers were demoralized by his charge, he might, perhaps, with the support of the troops at Klip Drift, have captured the laager then and there, and with it a great part of Cronje's force. But he knew nothing of the tempting prize within his grasp. His orders to proceed to Kimberley were explicit and urgent. Accordingly he resumed his march at 12.45 P.M., leaving a post of 200 mounted infantry and two guns at Abon's Dam. At 2.30 P.M. the division came within distant view of Kimberley, but nearly an hour was spent in persuading the Kimberley heliographers that they were not being misled by Boer signallers. Meanwhile the division was spread out, Broadwood being sent westward towards Alexandersfontein, the main body keeping on for Kimberley. As it happened the Kimberley garrison had pushed out and captured the Alexandersfontein position the day before, and the Boers under Du Toit were just engaged in an attempt to recapture it when the appearance of Broadwood's horsemen, following hard upon an agitated telegram from Froneman, announcing that French had broken through with a great force, caused a general panic-stricken flight. The main body meanwhile, after a short skirmish, took the Boer laager at Fort Susannah, south-east of the town, and, continuing without further opposition, bivouacked just east of Kimberley at Blankenberg's Vlei. French rode into the town, where he was met by the mayor (6.30 P.M.), and then to the Sanatorium, where he found Rhodes and Kekewich, and passed the night. Messages were sent back by cable and by flashlight, *viâ* Modder River, to Kitchener, informing him that the Boers had abandoned all the southern section of the investing line, and that French intended crossing their communications north of Kimberley at dawn. French added that he was anxious to co-operate in any attack that Kitchener might make. To these messages no answer was received.

Roberts at Wegdraai; occupation of Jacobsdal.

At 4 A.M. that same morning Roberts had advanced his headquarters to Wegdraai, accompanied by the Ninth Division. Unless developments at Ronddavel Drift should compel an immediate march to the Modder, his plan was first to occupy Jacobsdal with the Seventh Division, sending a brigade on to

Kitchener in the afternoon. The occupation of Jacobsdal commended itself, not only as likely to divert Cronje's attention from French's movements, but also as opening up a much shorter line of communication with the railway, and already on the previous day Roberts had instructed Colonel Richardson to transfer all the ox-wagon traffic to the line Honeynest Kloof–Jacobsdal.* Accordingly at 11 A.M. General Wavell, with the 15th Brigade and C.I.V. Mounted Infantry, was ordered to take Jacobsdal, a task which, owing to the stubborn and skilful resistance of some 200 Boers under Commandant Smit, was not completed till 3 P.M. All other moves for the day, and Roberts's own advance to Jacobsdal, were, however, postponed by the news that the Boers were attacking the supply park which, with a small rearguard, had been left behind at Waterval Drift.

De Wet attacks the supply park left at Waterval.

The oxen of the supply park had been worked almost uninterruptedly since the 13th, helping over the rest of the transport, and, after finally crossing the river with their own wagons, were quite incapable of a further march, and had been left behind with orders to come on to Wegdraai at 5 P.M. Colonel Ridley, with some 300 mounted infantry, mostly belonging to the 8th M.I., reached Waterval late in the evening of the 14th, and General Kelly, D.A.G. Headquarters, who, in Kitchener's absence, was acting as Chief of Staff, considered that these, and 200 men detached from Colvile's division, would be sufficient protection to a convoy which, on the move, extended over six or seven miles of road.† Considering that the headquarters intelligence had anticipated that Boer reinforcements for Cronje might be coming up from Fauresmith, and still more considering that

* This order naturally did not affect the company of the supply park already at Waterval Drift, though some such impression seems afterwards to have arisen in Lord Roberts's mind. See Evidence War Commission, vol. i., p. 463.

† Colonel Richardson, Major Long, in charge of the wagons, Colonel Ridley, and Lt.-Col. Ewart, A.A.G. Ninth Division, apparently all made representations at headquarters on the afternoon and evening of the 14th as to the need of an adequate escort, and the last-named was specifically informed that 200 men from his division would be sufficient. Accordingly Sir H. Colvile left a company of Gordons and a squadron of Kitchener's Horse.

rumours actually reached headquarters on the 14th that the Boers were again at Blaauwbank, this order points to a lack of co-ordination between the receiving of information and the issuing of orders for which, not so much any individual, as the vicious staff organization of the day was responsible. As it happened, De Wet had left his hiding-place as soon as his scouts informed him of the final departure of troops from De Kiel's, and had pushed forward with 300–400 men to Blaauwbank to watch Waterval Drift. No sooner had the distant dust cloud raised by the rear of the Ninth Division receded in the distance than he pushed forward on to the hills east of the drift—the same which he had so ineffectually held on the 12th—and after surprising and capturing the observation post left on one of these kopjes, opened long-range fire on the convoy (8.45 A.M.).

Oxen stampeded. Roberts sends back reinforcements.

The convoy had been parked by the roadside about 1,000 yards north-east of the drift, and the oxen were all over the veld grazing. Colonels Johnson* and Ridley made such arrangements for the defence as were possible under the circumstances. Captain Dingwall's company of the Gordons were posted on a slight ridge east of the convoy, Kitchener's Horse completed their right to the river, while the 8th M.I. covered the road to Wegdraai, and held the line of the river. Most of the oxen were driven down to the shelter of the river-bed; the wagons were unloaded and formed into a laager; breastworks were made of oat-sacks and biscuit-boxes and manned by the Army Service Corps personnel. More of De Wet's force, supported by a field-piece and a pom-pom, now came up, but the British held their own without difficulty.† As soon as the news reached Lord Roberts, he ordered back the 7th M.I. under Colonel Bainbridge, and the 18th Battery, R.F.A., following them up by the Scottish Borderers from

* Assistant-Director of Supplies, and actually senior officer on the spot. Ridley, however, commanded the rearguard, and as a combatant officer seems to have been considered by Lord Roberts as responsible for the conduct of the fighting.

† About this time (10–11 A.M.) some of the Boers reconnoitring on the left bank captured a small convoy, bringing up spare boots, escorted by a handful of convalescents under Lieut. Craigie-Halkett, H.L.I. (killed), which was on its way from Ramdam to the drift.

Chermside's brigade. The mounted infantry arrived about noon, and when the guns opened on the Boer positions soon after, the rifle-fire died down considerably. In obedience to a suggestion from headquarters, Colonel Johnson now made an attempt to get away the convoy. But no sooner were the oxen brought out of the river-bed than the Boers opened a tremendous shell and rifle-fire on them. The cattle stampeded, making straight for the Boer position, and the Kaffir drivers, after a few were shot, gave up the attempt to turn them, and bolted across the river. Over half the teams (1,600 oxen) were thus lost, and many others were killed or disabled. Bainbridge now made an attempt to turn the Boer right, hoping, when the infantry arrived, to clear the position altogether. But the latter, arriving after 2 P.M., were too exhausted by their march for any offensive work, while the mounted infantry, after getting by 5 P.M. within 600 yards of the Boers, now reinforced to perhaps 1,000 men,* were driven back in some confusion. Meanwhile, on receipt of further messages, Roberts had sent back General Tucker with the 62nd Battery and the Hampshires, the remaining two battalions of Chermside's brigade following part of the way in support. Arriving at dusk Tucker concerted plans with Ridley and Johnson for clearing out the Boers at daybreak, but reported that two more battalions and a battery would be required to make certain.

Roberts decides to abandon the convoy.

Roberts had been considerably troubled by the holding up of the convoy, and his anxiety was only increased by the reports that reached him after Tucker's arrival. It was clear that a great part of the convoy was immobile till fresh oxen were brought up, and that, though the Boers might be driven away, the troops engaged would probably not be back at Wegdraai till late next evening. At the moment it seemed as if every available man might be wanted at Klip Drift, or even nearer Kimberley, during the next two days. He sent for Richardson and asked if the army could get on if the

* These reinforcements apparently included some of Jacobs's Fauresmith men, and of the Heidelbergers who had been sent round from Natal, of whom some 350 had been diverted to Fauresmith on the news of a British concentration at Modder River.

convoy were sacrificed. Richardson pointed out that the troops had two full days' supplies with them, that of the remaining companies of the supply park on their way up from Orange River, one was already loaded up at Honeynest Kloof and could reach Jacobsdal within twenty-four hours, and that a certain number of wagons with supplies might be got from Modder River. There were plenty of slaughter cattle, and by putting the troops on half-rations of bread-stuffs and groceries, and increasing the fresh meat allowance, the thing could be done. After a brief hesitation Roberts decided to sacrifice every other consideration to the certainty of having every man in hand for the decisive encounter, and at 11 P.M. ordered Tucker to bring the whole force back to Wegdraai before daybreak, if necessary abandoning all the wagons he could not take with him. Four days' supplies, and nearly a third of the whole laboriously-concentrated ox-transport, were thus lost at one stroke.* In its fearless single-mindedness this decision must always compel admiration, and none the less because the actual development of events during the next few hours rendered it unnecessary.† But it is impossible to exonerate the Headquarters Staff from the responsibility for the original neglect, which now forced the choice between such unpleasant alternatives on the Commander-in-Chief, and in its after-effects, in particular by the reduction of the forage ration, undoubtedly hampered the effective action of his force.

Fresh supplies hurried up.

By 5 A.M. Tucker and Ridley were back at Wegdraai, where the dispirited party were met by Roberts with a few kindly words of encouragement. At 10 A.M., thanks to the energy and resource of Lieut.-Colonel Winter, supply officer at Modder River, a small convoy with supplies reached

* Viz., 170 wagons, 150,000 men's rations, 30,000 forage rations, and 500 slaughter cattle.

† An alternative which does not seem to have occurred to Roberts was to leave a small force to intrench themselves round the convoy. With unlimited supplies and water a few hundred men could have maintained themselves indefinitely, while the attraction of such a prize as the convoy presented would have kept De Wet engaged, and have precluded his unwelcome appearance at Paardeberg on the 18th, or any attempt upon the line of communications.

Jacobsdal.* The wagons from Honeynest Kloof arrived early on the 17th, and were pushed on after the troops. The rest of the supply park followed by forced marches, and by dint of extraordinary exertions on the part of the supply and transport officers the army was kept going on half-rations till the end of the month. One result of the convoy incident, however, was that Roberts decided, on the 18th, to separate the direction of supply and transport on his staff, entrusting the latter to General Nicholson.

De Wet's doings. Feb. 15–17.

Roberts had at once warned all the posts on the railway to be prepared for an attack by the force which had captured the convoy, which he estimated at 1,500 men. But De Wet was not yet the man he was to prove himself later, and made no attempt to follow up his unexpected and undeserved success. Most of the 16th he spent in loading up and inspanning the abandoned wagons, with which he proceeded towards Koffyfontein. Hearing, however, that some 60 Kitchener's Horse were at Blaauwbosch Pan,† he proceeded there with part of his force in the evening, and captured this unsupported and apparently forgotten detachment. Next morning he began cautiously reconnoitring towards the Modder, when he fell in with Lubbe's detachment, and learnt that Kimberley was relieved, and that Cronje was retiring in the direction of Bloemfontein. Hearing at the same time that reinforcements under Assistant-Fighting-General Philip Botha had reached Koffyfontein, he decided to return and join these before venturing to proceed to Cronje's assistance.

Cronje retreats up the Modder. Feb. 15–16.

While De Wet was capturing supply wagons, the fate of the main Boer army was being sealed. French's successful charge had created a regular panic in the head laager, and the occupation of Jacobsdal, followed in the afternoon by a general bombardment of the Magersfontein trenches by Methuen's artillery, helped to increase the general confusion and demoralization. Cronje himself seems to have tempor-

* Winter was informed at 2 A.M., and by stripping ambulances, impounding the wagons and teams of some loyalist refugees just arrived from Vryburg, and taking the teams of the naval guns, had thirty-six wagons loaded and ready to start by 6 A.M.

† See p. 386.

arily collapsed in a state of dull bewilderment. One spectator * describes him as sitting in his tent, a broken man, while his wife patted his head; and other accounts agree that he hardly left his tent that day. A first hasty conference with Froneman, De Beer, and other commandants, just after French had passed through, resulted in the decision to stay on in the *pan* and await events. But later on, as burgher after burgher came into Cronje's tent and urged escape while there was yet time, he reluctantly decided to retreat up the Modder and take up a new position covering Bloemfontein. At sundown orders were sent to all the burghers in the Magersfontein positions to collect at the head laager ready to start. At the same time Cronje communicated his intention to the forces round Kimberley, ordering Du Toit with the Transvaalers to retire to Fourteen Streams, and suggesting to Ferreira, the Free State head commandant, to fall back eastwards and join hands with him higher upstream. By midnight the whole of the Boer force was assembled at the head laager and started off, keeping some four or five miles north of the river, and making across for the angle of the bend above Klip Drift. Of the 5,000 Boers who went with Cronje, nearly a third were on foot, and the rest but sorrily mounted; of the wagons, over 80 were left in the *pan* for lack of teams. In no sort of order the huge mob of men and wagons straggled in the bright moonlight right across the front of the British force, completely unobserved.

Reasons for Cronje's action.

Of all the lines of retreat open to Cronje, the one chosen offered the least chance of success. Apart from the foolhardiness of attempting to take a convoy of over 400 wagons across the front of the British at Klip Drift, it gave his slow column no appreciable start, and it meant separation from the commandos round Kimberley. A retreat by Kimberley, either to the east or west of the town, would have given him a good start, and the latter route would also have furnished excellent positions for rearguard actions. United with Du Toit and Ferreira, Cronje might even, had he preserved his presence of mind, have carried out a sudden stroke against French or Kimberley itself. But

* Count Adalbert Sternberg.

such strategical considerations did not affect the untrained and slow-thinking Boer commander. Even now he had not grasped Roberts's plan, and could see nothing in the British movements beyond a march to Kimberley. By withdrawing out of the line of this advance he presumed that he would be left alone for the immediate present, while the forces at Modder River, Jacobsdal and Klip Drift each marched to join French by the nearest road. The line up the Modder was the shortest route to the position he wished to take up, and the only one with a good water supply for his oxen. Moreover, it was much more in the direction from which Cronje had originally come, and from which his supplies had regularly come since, and for a general who depended on instinct, and not on maps, such a fact was probably not without influence.* As for the initial risk, Cronje had too low an opinion of British scouting to feel any serious alarm. Unfortunately, that opinion was justified.

Failure of British at Klip Drift to keep touch with Cronje.

All day during the 15th the Sixth Division and Mounted Infantry rested at Ronddavel and Klip Drifts. Parties of Boers sent out to protect the laager from the general attack which Cronje anticipated were engaged off and on with the 2nd M.I., who held the outposts. From the reports of these outposts, both Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny were made aware of the close proximity of a Boer laager, but no one seems to have realized that this was actually Cronje's main camp, and no conclusions were drawn from the information acquired. That evening the two generals discussed the morrow's operations, and agreed to move forward the Mounted Infantry through Abon's Dam at an early hour, followed by the 13th Brigade in support. The idea was to get in touch with French in case he needed support, and to complete the circle round Cronje in case the latter attempted to break out north-eastwards towards Boshof. Had the proximity of Cronje's main force been clearly realized, it is difficult to conceive that these steps would not have been taken on the

* The Bloemhof burghers and some other detachments who had originally come with De la Rey from the siege of Kimberley (see vol. ii., pp. 272, 385) made no attempt to follow Cronje, but retired that same night round to the west of Kimberley, the way they had originally come.

15th in spite of the extreme exhaustion of both infantry and Mounted Infantry from their last marches. But under the circumstances the desire to keep the troops reasonably fresh for the next day's operations was, perhaps, excusable. What is hard to excuse is the absence of any attempt, at so critical a period, to keep in touch with the Boers during the evening and night of the 15th. But the idea of keeping in constant touch with an enemy by means of scouting, more especially night scouting, was so entirely unfamiliar to the British Army, in practice if not in theory, that the failure to do so in this case is worth noting, not as a specially blameworthy instance of negligence, but as a signal exemplification of the defects of a system which fails to recognize that information is the soul of war.

British marching for Kimberley discover Cronje's convoy. Feb. 16. 6 A.M.

At 4.30 A.M. on the 16th Hannay started off with the Mounted Infantry.* Towards 6 A.M. Captain Chester Master, who, with the advanced screen of Rimington's Guides, was now nearing the nek through which the cavalry had charged the day before, noticed in the grey light a vast cloud of dust rising behind the broken line of kopjes to his right front. A large column, there could be no doubt of it! A solitary wagon slowly toiling across the British front was further confirmation, and a moment later its occupants, haled before Master by a couple of his "Tigers," confessed that nothing less than Cronje's whole convoy had just passed beyond the end of the ridges. Master had at once sent back word to Hannay urging an immediate occupation of the line of these kopjes, for the northern end of which De Lisle, with the advanced guard of the 6th M.I., was already making. But when some minutes passed and nothing happened, he galloped back, only to find that Hannay had halted his force, and now insisted on waiting till Knox, who was in general command of the movement, could come up to confer with him. During the precious half hour thus wasted the Boers had discovered the British advance, and occupied the line of kopjes with a strong rearguard. Before this the dust cloud had been observed, and its course conjectured, by

* 2nd, 4th, 5th and 6th M.I., N.S.W.M.I., portions of Roberts's and Kitchener's Horse and Rimington's Guides; about 2,000 altogether.

Knox, marching along in rear, and by Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny on the kopje above Klip Drift. "Objective changed; go for convoy," was the order sent forward by Kitchener, from which Kelly-Kenny's simultaneous order differed only in the wording. But long before these messages arrived Knox had swung his brigade to the right, ordered the 81st Battery to come into action against the kopjes, found Hannay, and arranged for a general attack.

The M.I. attempting to get round Boer left are thrown into confusion.

A reconnaissance by Kitchener's Horse against the front of the kopjes at once drew a heavy fire, before which the irregulars fell back in some confusion. Knox decided to turn the line of kopjes, and, choosing what seemed the shortest route, ordered Hannay to make for the gap between the right of the kopjes and the river, towards which the infantry were already moving. As it turned out, it would probably have been better to have made for the other flank, where De Lisle had already been in time to seize the detached northernmost kopjes, whence he subsequently managed to push on some five miles further east, right round the rear of the Boer convoy, unchecked, but too weak to interfere effectively. Had this been done, and had the Mounted Infantry been capable of holding Cronje till the infantry attack could develop, which is, perhaps, open to doubt, Cronje's retreat might very well have ended at Klip Kraal. As it was, Hannay took his column forward towards the gap on the right. When about half a mile away the Boers opened fire, both from the kopjes on his left and from the trees by the river bank. The column began trotting forward, then suddenly halted.* The Boers, bringing a gun and a pom-pom into play, redoubled their fire on the splendid stationary target now presented to them. A moment later a great part of the Mounted Infantry bolted headlong in a broken mass for the cover of the river bank in rear. Charging over the steep bank, they were thrown into yet more inextricable confusion, and the river-bed for half a mile or more was a seething *mêlée* of men and horses struggling in the deep

* The word "halt" seems to have been passed along the column without orders, and to have then been acquiesced in by Hannay, who thought it might have come from Knox.

current, hopelessly bogged in the treacherous edge of the "Mud" River, or scrambling about under the bank. Fortunately the Boers made no attempt to follow up their success, but, even as it was, large numbers of horses were drowned, and the whole Mounted Infantry force completely disorganized. The incident was a signal object-lesson in the deficiencies of the improvised force and of its leading. The task set the Mounted Infantry was similar in character to that which French had set Gordon the day before, and probably not more difficult. The difference lay in the execution.

Knox captures first Boer position; M.I. sent round; close of engagement.

Knox decided that the best thing was to send the Mounted Infantry back to cross at Klip Drift and, cutting across the bend of the river, to demonstrate against Klip Kraal from the south. The Oxfordshire Light Infantry and the 81st Battery were also sent across near the angle of the bend and, supported by the West Ridings on the right bank, worked upstream, clearing the Boers out of the brushwood and dongas. Meanwhile the Buffs advanced across the open against the kopjes and took them without much opposition. The whole line of kopjes north of the bend was now occupied (9 A.M.). But the Boer rearguard, skilfully commanded by Commandant Roos, had attained its object. The convoy was safely in laager at Klip Kraal Drift, and new positions covering it were already being taken up on the much more formidable Drieputs Kopjes in the angle between Klip Kraal and the bend, and in the dongas on the opposite bank. The West Ridings, Buffs, and Gloucesters now pushed slowly on across the level against the western end of the Drieputs Kopjes, while the Oxfordshire Light Infantry recrossed the river at the eastern end of the bend and attacked the kopjes from the south, supported by the 81st Battery and, after 11 A.M., by the 6th M.I., which had been recalled from the left flank. Kelly-Kenny, too, now came up (12 noon) and for the next few hours watched the action from the left bank, but without interfering with Knox's dispositions. Some hours before this, Kitchener, convinced that the essential thing was not so much to attack the Boers as to head them off, had taken the 76th Battery from

Stephenson's brigade with the idea that the battery, together with the whole of the Mounted Infantry now engaged in pulling itself together at Klip Drift, should make straight along the south bank for Paardeberg Drift, fifteen miles further upstream—a bold conception, thoroughly characteristic of its author. Colonel McDonnell conveyed the order to Hannay, who declared that he could not go farther than Klip Kraal. Accordingly the Mounted Infantry did not proceed beyond a ridge to the south-west of Klip Kraal Drift, where it arrived in driblets. Here it was joined towards 4 P.M. by the 76th Battery, which began shelling the laager with some effect at 3,500 yards range. This provoked the Boers to a sudden vigorous counter-attack from the river-bed and the dongas on the left bank, supported by two guns. The Mounted Infantry fell back in some confusion, and the battery was compelled to follow. On the right bank the infantry had meanwhile with difficulty secured a footing on the kopjes, but without dislodging the Boers, who managed to hold their own till dusk. Kitchener, who had ridden over to the scene of action between 3 and 4 P.M., but without coming across Kelly-Kenny, had returned, apparently still convinced of the possibility of the whole force pressing on for Paardeberg Drift that night. Such an idea does not seem ever to have presented itself to Knox or any one else on the spot, and, indeed, it is unlikely that the men could have gone on without a short rest. The troops accordingly bivouacked on the positions they occupied when they left off fighting. Their casualties were over 100, of which 52 fell on the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, who bore the brunt of the day. And thus, thanks to the skilful handling of his rearguard and to the failure of the British mounted infantry, Cronje had managed to hold off his pursuers while his convoy rested for the next march, by which he hoped finally to shake himself free.

Methuen fails to discover Cronje's departure.

Methuen's orders had been to remain on the defensive, at any rate till the army should be in Jacobsdal, but to keep the closest possible watch on the Boer movements. Nevertheless, though the news of French's entry into Kimberley reached him on the evening of the 15th, no special effort was

made to watch the trenches and laagers that night. In the morning no Boers were visible in the trenches opposite, and a native scout reported that they had left. But it was not till 9.30 A.M., after receipt of a message from Roberts asking Methuen to find out if Magersfontein was really evacuated, that Pole-Carew was sent out with two battalions and a troop of cavalry to "reconnoitre," and succeeded in discovering by 11.35 A.M. what, by risking a couple of troopers' lives, might have been discovered in half-an-hour. The incident is interesting as giving an even more typical instance than the one discussed just above of the ignorance of the very meaning of the word information, and of the trouble and risk worth incurring to secure it, which prevailed in the army. An immediate advance to Kimberley was ordered, but was countermanded when it was discovered that every wagon in camp, save one, had been sent to Jacobsdal to replace the lost convoy, and Methuen had to content himself with occupying Merton Siding and Magersfontein. That same morning a battalion of Stephenson's brigade, resting at Klip Drift, occupied the deserted laager at Bosjespan.

Roberts suggests French should head off Cronje.

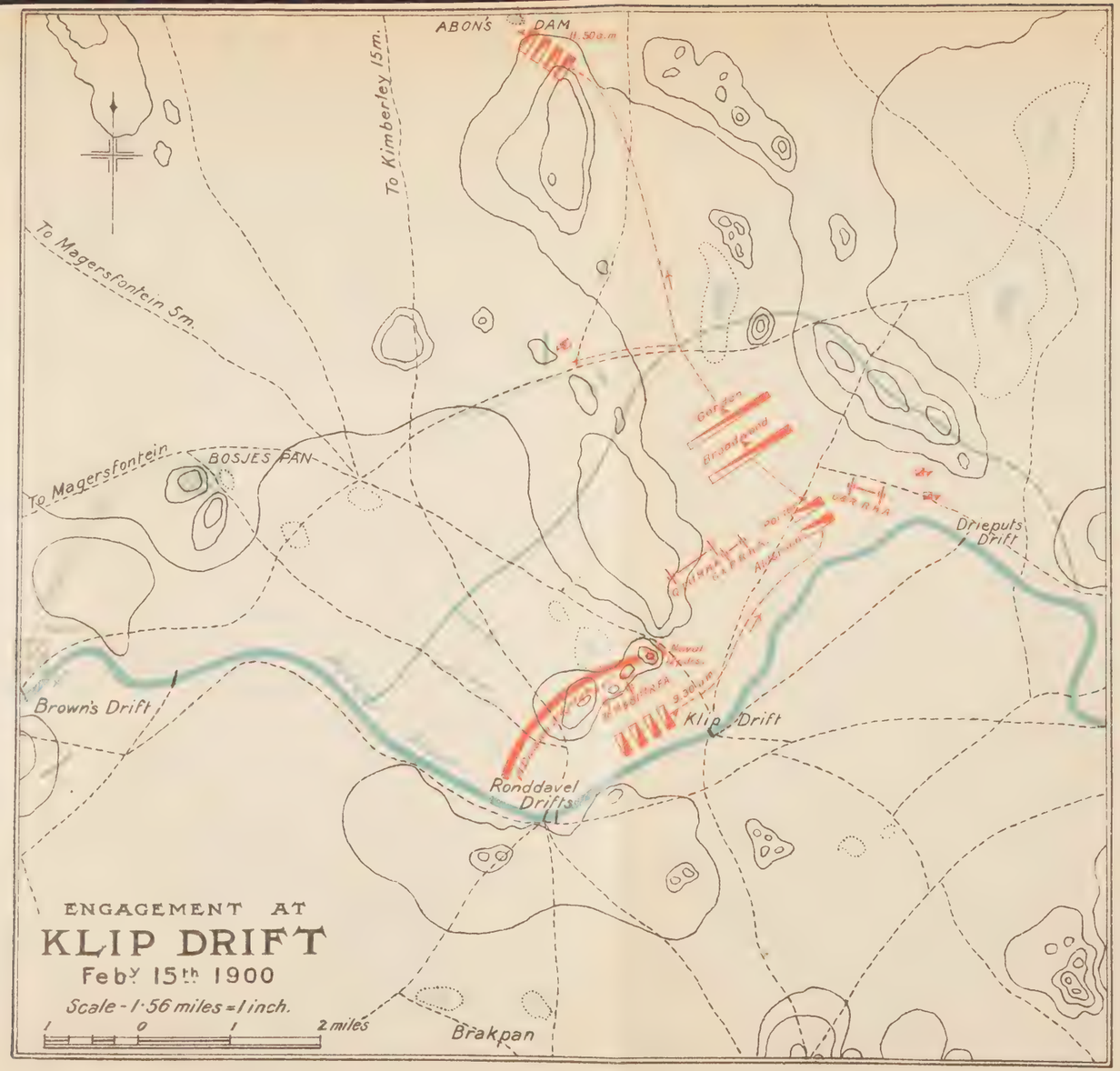
Roberts had only waited at Wegdraai for Tucker's return from Waterval Drift before transferring his headquarters to Jacobsdal, whither he was followed by Colvile with the 19th Brigade, the Highland Brigade and 14th Brigade being left at Wegdraai. His first impulse, on hearing from Kitchener, was to send back a message at 8.30 A.M. suggesting that French should send part of his force to head Cronje off. He subsequently repeated this in a message to French direct, ordering him to go in a south-easterly direction through Boschvarkfontein, if necessary crossing the river, but not going beyond Petrusburg without further instructions. These messages, as well as others sent by Kitchener, unfortunately did not reach their destination owing to the fact that the field telegraph to Kimberley had been cut by the passing convoy. The break was not discovered till the afternoon, and no attempt was, apparently, made to send the message by galloper or through the Enslin heliograph station. At the same time (9 A.M.) he consulted Kitchener as to the advisability of hurrying the Ninth Division across to Klip Kraal

DIRECTIONS

British

Boers

Guns



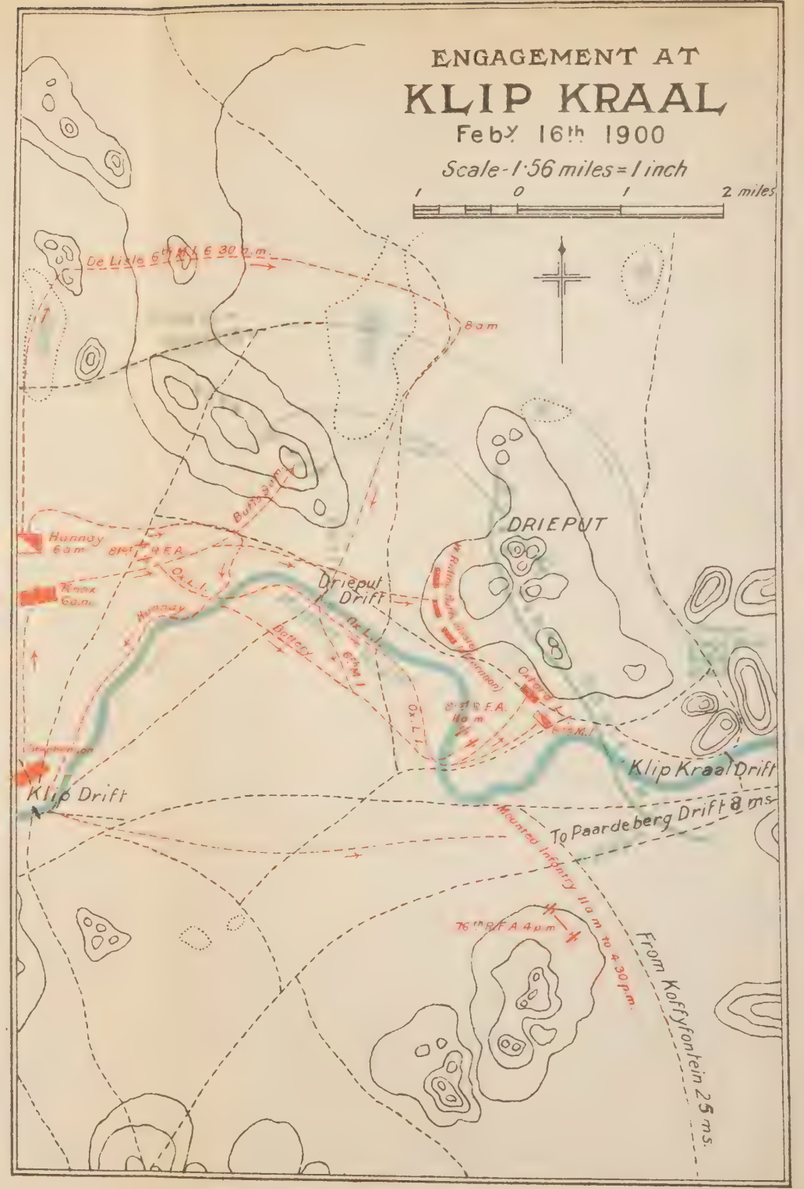
ENGAGEMENT AT

KLIP DRIFT

Feby 15th 1900

Scale - 1·56 miles = 1 inch.

1 0 1 2 miles



ENGAGEMENT AT

KLIP KRAAL

Feby 16th 1900

Scale - 1·56 miles = 1 inch

1 0 1 2 miles

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. London

Drift in order to prevent the Boers breaking away to the south, and in subsequent messages to Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny urged on them both to do their utmost to press the pursuit: "every hour now is worth days hereafter."

After some hesitation he sends Ninth Division after Kitchener.

But in spite of Kitchener's assurance that he had Cronje's whole force before him, the Commander-in-Chief still felt doubtful and uncertain as to the real situation and as to the measures required to deal with it. Nor was this uncertainty wholly dispelled by Methuen's report, at midday, that the whole of Cronje's force had gone off to the east. After all a great part of it might have gone north by Spytfontein, and Kimberley might still be in some danger, the more so if French's cavalry were withdrawn to head off the convoy. It was doubtful whether the Ninth Division could ever catch up Cronje, if Kelly-Kenny failed to hold him, or whether, since the loss of the convoy, supplies could be pushed after it quick enough. Possibly, too, the presence of a force of unknown strength hanging about his rear* may have confirmed his disinclination to send all his troops too far out of reach, without further information, on what might prove to be a useless errand. Whatever his motives, he now decided, pending further information, not to send the Ninth Division to Klip Kraal, but to Brown's Drift, where it could be conveniently supplied and sent on to Kimberley, recalled, or diverted in pursuit of Cronje with equal facility. Summoning Colvile, and explaining to him that he was to be prepared to push on to Kimberley, he ordered him to march to Brown's Drift with the 19th Brigade that evening, while the Highland Brigade were to move in to Jacobsdal at 3 A.M. on the 17th. It was not till after 6 P.M., on receipt of full news from Kitchener about the day's fighting, coupled with a pressing request for the Ninth Division, that he felt fully convinced as to the real situation, and definitely made up his mind that all other considerations must give way to the imperative necessity of destroying Cronje's force. Orders were issued, first to the Seventh, but subsequently to the Ninth Division, for an immediate advance in support of the Sixth Division, and

* The 19th Brigade had stood to arms for some time that morning owing to a rumour that a Boer force was approaching from the south.

a further message was sent at 7 P.M. to French repeating the instruction to ride across and cut off Cronje's retreat. At 9.30 P.M. Colvile, with the 19th Brigade and 65th and 82nd Batteries, marched off to Klip Drift, arriving at 4.30 A.M. on the 17th, while the Highland Brigade, together with the 7th and 8th M.I., marched at 11 P.M. from Wegdraai straight for Klip Kraal Drift, which they reached at 5.30 A.M. (16 miles). The message to French was transmitted by flash-light from Modder River and reached him at 11 P.M. Before this (10 P.M.) Captain Chester Master had ridden in from Klip Drift with a letter from Kitchener, urging French to ride across to Koedoesrand Drift, at which point he calculated the cavalry might still be able to arrive before the Boer convoy.

Feb. 16. French goes out N. of Kimberley.

All this day the cavalry had been busily engaged. French had started off from the east side of Kimberley at 5.30 A.M. with the 1st and 3rd Brigades and Alderson's Mounted Infantry, leaving Broadwood to reconnoitre southwards towards Magersfontein and Abon's Dam. In pursuance of his original orders to cross the railway north of Kimberley and head off the Boer retreat, and in default of further instructions, his intention was to cross to the west near Dronfield (7 miles north of Kimberley) and head off any Boer convoy, Cronje's or any other, making north on that side, and, if possible, to capture the "Long Tom" which had been shelling the town from Kamfersdam. But it was already too late to do this. The Boers round Kimberley had little need of Cronje's message advising retreat. No sooner had darkness set in on the 15th than they began to make off with all possible speed. Ferreira, with all the Free State commandos on the eastern side, fell back along the Boshof road, and they were miles away before French's cavalry rode out over their deserted positions next morning. On the west Du Toit and Kolbe with the Transvaalers and the rest of the Free Staters had trekked by daybreak as far as Droogfontein, four or five miles west of Macfarlane's station (11 miles north of Kimberley). With them was the "Long Tom" which the Warrenton rebels had with great exertion got away that night. Of all the positions round

Kimberley the only one not abandoned was the bush-covered ridge just east of the railway at Dronfield. This was held by some 150–200 Griqualand West rebels, with a 9-pounder Krupp, under Commandant Van Aswegen, who, whether unaffected by the general panic, or simply ignorant of what had happened, had quietly remained in their little laager. Their presence had already checked an attempt of the Kimberley garrison to push out to Kamfersdam on the previous evening, and they were on this day to do most useful work for the cause they had espoused.

Fighting round Macfarlane's.

Soon after starting French was informed of the escape of the Kamfersdam gun and of the point reached by the Boer convoy. He at once decided to head off the convoy with Gordon's brigade, which was to make a broad sweep round to the north-east and cross the railway north of Macfarlane's station, while Porter's brigade attacked it directly in flank and rear, the Mounted Infantry supporting and connecting the two cavalry brigades. He knew that there were Boers on the Dronfield ridge, but as they cleared off from its main eastern portion before the cavalry advance, and as the Kimberley troops were engaging the western end, he did not assign much importance to them. The danger threatening their convoy was one to which the Boers were fully alive, and when Gordon's brigade came round to cross the railway they found the Boers posted in some strength on the high ground east of Macfarlane's. The cavalry tried to work round the Boer left, but their horses were too exhausted for rapid manœuvring on these arid dunes, and their attempts were successfully met by extensions of the Boer line. French had before this despatched a message to Porter to send up his guns to support "O" and "R," which were coming into action on the left of Gordon's brigade, and to attack the position himself on the left, while the M.I. pushed forward in the centre. Had this been done promptly the Boers would probably have given way at once, for they were thoroughly demoralized, and, in spite of the exertions of Du Toit and Vermaas, were with difficulty kept fighting at all.

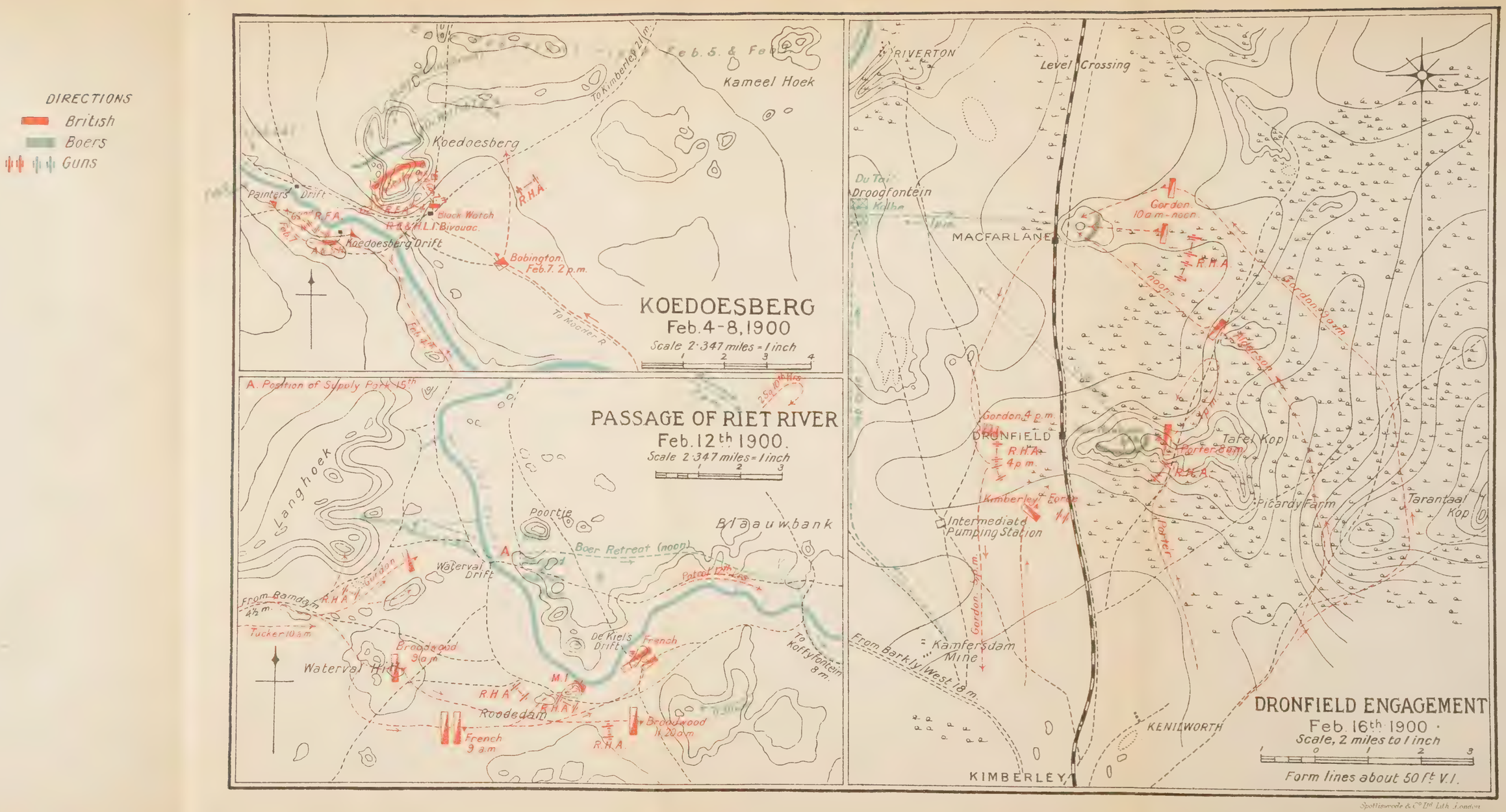
Owing to Porter's delay

But Porter showed no signs of coming. As his brigade crossed the Dronfield ridge it had suddenly come under a

at Dronfield French abandons pursuit. Gallantry of Griqualand rebels.

heavy fire at 600 yards' range from the intrenched Griqualanders. Turning against this new enemy, Porter attempted to clear the Dronfield position before proceeding. But his efforts were unsuccessful, and he only became involved in an action which completely absorbed his attention, to the neglect of his definite orders. It was not till well after midday that, in response to repeated messages, he abandoned the attempt on Dronfield, and moved on to join French. Before this French, tired of waiting, had ordered Alderson to take the position at Macfarlane's. This was successfully done, and the Boers fell back to the convoy. Nothing but five miles of open now lay between French and this coveted prize. But the horses were worked to a standstill, there was no water to be found anywhere, and reluctantly French gave up the idea of capturing the convoy as hopeless. Had he realized how demoralized the Boers were, he might, perhaps, have pushed on with the intention of capturing the laager at all costs, and, in default of water there, taking on his force to camp at the Vaal for the night. But the risk was great, and his force might at any moment be required against Cronje. Accordingly he decided to return,* but not before punishing the audacious little force which had spoiled his whole operation. All five batteries were now brought in action against the handful of men on the Dronfield ridge: "O," "R" and "T" on the west, and "U" and "Q" on the east, the latter being pushed up to within 700 yards of the Boer trenches. But the enemy still kept up so hot a fire that French hesitated before the losses involved in a dismounted attack, and ordered the troops back to bivouac (5 P.M.). Only the Diamond Fields Artillery and Kimberley mounted troops remained in action against the Dronfield ridge. A little later Van Aswegen and his band of stout-hearted rebels seized the opportunity of a great dust storm blowing across the veld to leap on their ponies and gallop away completely unobserved. At the cost of a score or so of casualties, their gallant conduct had saved Du Toit's commandos from complete dispersion. French himself reached Kimberley by 7 P.M., and there learnt,

* Pilcher, with 3rd M.I., Queenslanders and New Zealanders, was left at Macfarlane's.


DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
Kameel Hoek
To Kimberley 21 m.
Koedoesberg
Painters Drift
Painters
65th R.F.A.
Feb. 7
Black Watch
R.A. & H.L.I. Bivouac.
Koedoesberg Drift
R.H.A.
Babington. Feb. 7. 2 p.m.
To Modder R.
Feb. 7
KOEDOESBERG
Feb. 4-8, 1900
Scale 2·347 miles = 1 inch
A. Position of Supply Park 15th
Langhoek
Poortje
Boer Retreat (noon)
Waterval Drift
Gordon
R.H.A.
From Bamdam 4½ m.
Tucker 10 a.m.
Broadwood 9 a.m.
Waterval Hill
De Kiels Drift
French
To Koffyfontein 8 m.
M.I.
R.H.A.
Roodedam
French 9 a.m.
Broadwood 11.20 a.m.
R.H.A.
PASSAGE OF RIET RIVER
Feb. 12th 1900.
Scale 2·347 miles = 1 inch
RIVERTON
Level Crossing
Du Toi
Droogfontein
Kilns
MACFARLANE
Gordon 10 a.m.-noon.
R.H.A.
Gordon again
Porter
Gordon 4 p.m.
DRONFIELD
R.H.A. 4 p.m.
Porter 2 p.m.
R.H.A.
Kimberley Forts
Intermediate Pumping Station
Tafel Kop
Picardy Farm
Tarantaal Kop
Gordon 2 p.m.
From Barkly West 18 m.
Kamfersdam Mine
KENILWORTH
KIMBERLEY
DRONFIELD ENGAGEMENT
Feb. 16th 1900.
Scale, 2 miles to 1 inch
Form lines about 50 ft V.I.
Spottiswoode & Co Ltd. Lith. London

for the first time, from the reports of Broadwood's patrols, that a large convoy had trekked east from Magersfontein that morning, and that the country to the south was otherwise clear. Pursuit seemed out of the question, and the orders for the 17th only provided for reconnaissances in every direction round Kimberley.

Criticism of French's action on 16th.

February 16 was not a successful day for the cavalry. It served its immediate purpose, indeed, in hurrying on the Boer flight, and preventing any attempt at a reinvestment of Kimberley. But it was disastrous in its consequences. The losses in men had been trifling,* but for the horses the long harassing day, without a drop of water, coming at the end of four exhausting marches, proved absolutely fatal. For the moment the regiments who took part in the operation were completely demobilized, and they never really recovered.† This result was—apart from such permanent causes as the absurd overloading of the horses, and indifferent horsemastership—largely due to fortuitous circumstances, and if French began by undertaking a task which was bound, in any case, to prove exhausting to the horses, it would have been inexcusable if he had let the enemy retreat from Kimberley, before his eyes, without an attempt to cripple him. It has been suggested, in the light of after knowledge, that French should have left the retiring Boers alone, and devoted his attention to the force at Magersfontein. But in the absence of news or orders from headquarters, he may well have assumed that the rest of the encircling movement was not sufficiently developed to require his co-operation that day, which he might, therefore, profitably devote to punishing and dispersing one part of the Boer forces, before being summoned either to tackle Cronje in his positions or to check his retreat past Kimberley. But, granting this, it is still possible to find ground for criticism in the apparent inadequacy of the arrangements made to secure the immediate transmission

* Six officers and 22 men killed and wounded.

† The following extract from a private diary of the 17th is interesting: "I had a horse parade, and there were only 28 horses that could raise a trot. A week ago I commanded the best mounted regiment in the British Army, and now it is absolutely ruined."

to French of the information gathered by Broadwood's patrols.

French receives Kitchener's message and starts for Koedoesrand.

Whatever the explanation of French's action on the 16th, the fact remains that when, at 10 P.M., he received Kitchener's message urging him to go to Koedoesrand he had not 1,200 men fit to move in his whole force. But he realized at once that what the occasion demanded was not numbers, but promptitude and audacity. Orders were issued for Broadwood's brigade to march, at 3 A.M., for Koedoesrand, followed, at 4 A.M., by two squadrons of Carabiniers. Porter, as senior officer left in Kimberley, was to take over the command, conferring with Kekewich as regards the defences, and with Rhodes as regards supplies, and was to send on Gordon's brigade to Koedoesrand on the 18th. A few hours' rest, and French was in the saddle again, urging on his men to the best of their pace. He had thirty miles to cover to the enemy's fifteen, and every minute might tell.

Feb. 17. Cronje reaches Wolvekraal.

Time, too, was all in favour of the Boers. Cronje had started off again from Klip Kraal Drift soon after dark on the 16th. But so confident was he in his ability to shake off his pursuers, that he halted his convoy at midnight for four hours, in order to rest the oxen. It was not till well on in the morning that he passed Paardeberg Drift. His confidence was justified as far as concerned the enemy in his rear. The Sixth Division had started at 3 A.M., the 13th Brigade marching along the north bank from the kopjes west of Klip Kraal Drift, and the 18th Brigade, on the south, straight across from Klip Drift. But the Mounted Infantry, on whom the main hope of the pursuit depended, had made no attempt to start off early. They had been much scattered by the previous evening's counter-attack, and Hannay, who seems to have been considerably upset by the previous day's experiences, considered it necessary to collect and reorganize them in a body before sending any detachments forward to keep in touch with the enemy, in accordance with his instructions. It was not till 7.30 A.M., after receiving most peremptory orders, both from Kelly-Kenny and Kitchener, that Hannay advanced. Touch was regained with the Boer rearguard by 10 A.M., who, after their wagons had passed Paardeberg Drift,

took up positions on the conspicuous conical hill north of the drift, to which it gives its name, and on rising ground further to the north. But by this time Cronje, with the main body, had reached Wolvekraal, five miles further on, and was resting his convoy before crossing the river at Vendutie Drift.* Convinced that the main body of the British could not reach Paardeberg Drift, let alone turn the positions on the right bank, before nightfall, he already congratulated himself on having successfully made his escape. All that remained to do was to cross over, and, his line of retreat once secured, to select suitable positions to cover the road to Bloemfontein.

French surprises Cronje; fighting during afternoon.

The first wagons were just preparing to cross, the rest were being outspanned, and the weary cattle were being driven out to graze. The burghers lay down to sleep under the shade of their wagons, or busied themselves boiling coffee for the midday meal. Suddenly shells began falling into the midst of the wagons, not from the rear, but from the heights to the left front of the laager. French had reached Kameelfontein farm, four and a half miles north of the drift, at 10.15 A.M. Here he saw the great dust cloud of the convoy, and his conjecture was confirmed by some Boer signallers captured at the farm.† Riding forward to reconnoitre, he had found a good artillery position on rising ground within 2,500 yards of the Boer column, and had ordered up both batteries, which now opened fire (11.15 A.M.). Seized with panic, the Boers fled helter-skelter for the cover of the river bank, while, as at Waterval Drift, hundreds of oxen and horses strayed away across the veld towards the British lines. In the general confusion no one had the presence of mind to consider what might be the strength of the force that had thus dropped from the clouds. Three of Albrecht's guns, indeed, came into action in a plucky fashion, but for once, not only numbers, but advantage of position, was against

* Cronje presumably intended to cross both at Vendutie Drift and at Koedoesrand, but the latter, owing to the northward trend of the river, was less directly on the road to Bloemfontein.

† These had been sent out to try and get into heliographic communication with Ferreira.

them, and they were speedily silenced. Presently, too, a few men, less panic-stricken than the rest, were got together. A small party under Field-Cornet Nieuwenhoudt pushed forward, and attempted to turn the western end of the rise on which French's guns were posted. But the 10th Hussars raced them for a kopje dominating their approach, and, supported by "G" Battery, effectively checked this move. A spirited attempt by Colonel Fisher to take his men on from this position in the afternoon to a kopje (afterwards known as Gun Hill) close to the river on the west of the laager, was, however, beaten back by a heavy fire. Meanwhile, considerable reinforcements, including a gun, were sent upstream, under cover of the belt of bushes on both sides of the river, to join Cronje's advanced guard, which had not halted at Vendutie Drift, and was already in occupation of the heights extending from Koedoesrand Drift north-westwards towards Kameelfontein. These not only checked the 12th Lancers, whom French had sent out to occupy the Koedoesrand heights, and to reconnoitre Banks Drift, two miles lower down, but made repeated attempts to turn the British left, and recapture Kameelfontein. But the dismounted cavalrymen, scattered among the kopjes in the fashion they had learnt so well in front of Colesberg, managed to hold their own, while the guns, when not forced to support them, continued to shell the laager, making impossible any attempt to collect the cattle, or to get wagons over the drift. Still, even after the arrival of the Carabiniers at 3 P.M., the position of French's force was most precarious. Anxiously all eyes kept turning to the south-west through the long hot afternoon hours. Just before sunset a few horsemen, appearing in the direction of Paardeberg Drift, and a haze of dust beyond them, proclaimed that help was near. At dusk French ordered a salvo to be fired by the guns as a signal to the approaching troops, and intermittent shelling was continued through the night.

French unwittingly drives away Ferreira.

French could well be satisfied with the result of his audacious venture in stopping the march of Cronje's whole force with his handful of weary horsemen. But the full measure of his audacity and of his success was unknown even

to himself. On the evening of the 16th Ferreira had moved with his force of 1,500–2,000 men to Bothashoek, a mile or two north of the road by which French came out next morning, and barely twelve miles from Wolvekraal. On the report of French's approach a general panic seems to have set in. Instead of attempting to check or delay French's advance, or even falling back upon Cronje, Ferreira seems to have completely lost his head and retreated some ten miles north-eastwards towards Boshof. It was not till the morning of the 18th that he rode out with such of his burghers as had recovered sufficient courage to follow him, and endeavoured to join hands with Cronje. Then it was already too late either to envelope and destroy French, as could so easily have been done on the afternoon of the 17th, or to save the main Boer army. By thus preventing the junction of the Boer forces, French unwittingly achieved a success only second in its importance to the success he consciously set out to attain.

The rest of the British force gets up to Paardeberg.

Meanwhile the Mounted Infantry, after a short halt at Brandvallei Drift, had pushed on and, meeting with opposition from the Boer rearguard on the Paardeberg, mostly crossed over to the left bank, where they occupied all the rising ground south and south-east of Paardeberg Drift before nightfall. The Sixth Division was reunited at Brandvallei Drift after midday, the 13th Brigade having crossed to the left bank. At 5 P.M. it resumed its march for Paardeberg Drift. Losing the track in the dark, it had got some two miles south-east of the drift by midnight, when Kelly-Kenny ordered it to bivouac where it then found itself. Kitchener, with two aides-de-camp, had pushed on even further, and lay down among the furthest outposts of the 4th M.I., within two miles of Cronje's laager. All day he had been relentlessly hustling on the troops, more especially the Mounted Infantry, and after dark his consuming energy took him almost into the enemy's camp. The Highland Brigade rested at Klip Kraal * till 5 P.M., and marched into

* The Highland Light Infantry were here detached, and sent to hold Klip Drift, and afterwards Jacobsdal, but rejoined their brigade at Bloemfontein.

bivouac at Paardeberg Drift before midnight, having covered 31 miles in just over the 24 hours. The 19th Brigade, starting from Klip Drift, also at 5 P.M., marched all through the night and reached Paardeberg by 4.30 A.M., another very creditable performance, especially on the part of the batteries and transport which accompanied the brigade.

Roberts indisposed at Jacobsdal. Question of command at the front.

Further in rear no important movements took place. The rest of the naval guns were ordered over from Modder River to Jacobsdal, where the Seventh Division was also concentrated. Roberts, indeed, was prepared to make a night march after Kitchener with the Seventh Division if the latter thought it necessary, but he was anxious to await the arrival of the naval guns and of Colvile's Brigade Division, and, moreover, he had been suddenly prostrated that morning by a severe chill, which rendered it inadvisable for him to leave his quarters at Jacobsdal. Though not serious enough to interfere with his general direction of affairs, his indisposition, by prolonging his absence from the scene of action at this critical moment, was destined to have serious consequences. Technically, the command of the troops at the front devolved on Kelly-Kenny, as the senior officer present. But Kelly-Kenny, unlike Kitchener, was not in the secret of all Roberts's plans. Moreover, there can be no doubt that Roberts made Kitchener accompany the march of the Sixth Division from the night of the 13th onwards, not so much for the purpose of communicating his views to Kelly-Kenny, as in order to "hustle" him and make sure of his exacting the utmost exertions from his troops, a position hardly compatible with Kelly-Kenny's command. And, indeed, whoever may have commanded the troops during these days, there can be no doubt that it was Kitchener who drove them. Between these two officers the official—as distinguished from the personal—relation could not but be awkward. As long as the Chief of the Staff at the end of the field telegraph could profess to be expounding the Commander-in-Chief's instructions, his views were authoritative. Pending such instructions, and on all matters of detail requiring immediate decision, the voice of the senior general was supreme. Such an alternation of authority was

impracticable. On the 15th and 16th Kitchener and Kelly-Kenny each behaved as if they were in command, and only their cordial agreement as to the general policy to be adopted, and Kelly-Kenny's loyalty and good sense in not insisting on his technical rights, prevented serious friction. But on the morning of the 17th Kitchener, desperately resolved to overtake and crush Cronje, and afraid of meeting with difficulty from his older and more cautious colleague, referred the question of authority to the Commander-in-Chief. Roberts replied in a letter to Kelly-Kenny, in which he urged the latter to push on with all speed, and requested him to "consider that Lord Kitchener is with you for the purpose of communicating to you my orders, so that there may be no delay such as reference to and fro would entail." This answer practically amounted to an injunction to Kelly-Kenny to follow Kitchener's advice and ask no questions as to its source. But though it thus inclined the balance in Kitchener's favour, it still left the executive command in Kelly-Kenny's hands, and allowed too much scope for friction or even for a possible deadlock. It would have been far better if Roberts, unless he was prepared to trust Kelly-Kenny's discretion absolutely, had definitely and directly appointed Kitchener to the command, more especially as the arrival of another division made it impossible for Kelly-Kenny to command effectively without handing over his division to one of his brigadiers, and thus internally disorganizing it. Here, as so often in the war, faulty staff organization was the source of all confusion. Had Kitchener really been what he nominally was, namely, Chief of the Staff, he would never have left Headquarters, and some intelligent junior on the staff would have been sent to keep the Commander-in-Chief in communication with subordinate commanders. Had he nominally been what he virtually was, namely, second in command, the present difficulty and the following day's confusion could not have arisen.

CHAPTER XIV

PAARDEBERG

The success already achieved.

At the end of a week's campaigning, Roberts's army had driven Cronje from his lines and relieved Kimberley. It had, indeed, let Cronje slip through between its fingers and almost escape. But it had now once more got round him, and only needed a few hours' hesitation or delay on his part finally to crush him in its grip. In that achievement the most conspicuous part, undoubtedly, was played by French and the Cavalry Division. The dexterous crossing of the Riet, the long march to the Modder drifts, and the daring charge which relieved Kimberley, will always claim a high place in the history of cavalry. But even they can hardly compare with the supreme audacity which sent a handful of tired horsemen 30 miles to head off a force estimated at eight, and actually four times its own strength—incidentally frightening out of its path another hostile force of possibly twice its strength—and to hold its own by sheer bluff in the midst of overwhelming forces till help might come up. But the successes of the cavalry would have availed nothing if they had not been made good, step by step, by the infantry plodding patiently in rear. And, above all, the measure of success gained by cavalry and infantry alike was due to two factors: to the indefatigable, furious energy and driving power of Lord Kitchener, and to the bold conception and unfaltering execution of the Commander-in-Chief, whose active, confident spirit infused itself into all ranks of the army which he directed.

The issue still in Cronje's hands.

Yet, great as the success of Roberts's plan had been up to the evening of the 17th, it was only a success in the strategical preliminaries to victory. The Boers had been outmanœuvred, bewildered, frightened. But they had not been crushed. The destroying tactical stroke, which is the

end and aim of all true strategy, had not yet fallen upon them. Whether it would fall even now was still uncertain. By dint of tremendous exertions the British would have a force sufficient to deliver that blow within striking distance by daybreak on the 18th. If the morning found Cronje still at Wolvekraal, the prize was within their grasp. All would then depend on their readiness and their ability to strike hard, and to strike home. But in the meantime the fate of his force was still in Cronje's own hands. He had lost a good many of his oxen by the morning's surprise, and the rest were tired, but by using both Vendutie and Koedoesrand Drifts he could easily have crossed the river and got away with two-thirds of his convoy before dawn. He need not even have crossed. It was enough for his immediate safety if he could get the other side of the Koedoesrand heights, and for that short distance he might even have managed to move his whole convoy. There he would occupy a strong defensive position, and could hope to be joined by Ferreira, De Wet, and by the reinforcements coming up from Bloemfontein and Colesberg, and might well be able to hold his own against any attempt to push him further.

Cronje resolves not to move on night of 17th.

But Cronje had made up his mind not to move that night. The stubborn and bewildered old farmer thought that he had been hurried quite sufficiently. He had already abandoned many wagons, and foundered or lost hundreds of oxen, the private property of "upright" burghers, and he was not going to do so again unless driven by sheer force. All the instincts of the *voortrekker* bade him stay with his wagons, and, if need be, defend them against the British, as his fathers had defended their precious wagon-laagers against Dingaan and Mozilikatse. His position, in a hollow encircled by commanding heights, might not be good, but it gave a clear field of fire on both banks, and the river, running in its deep, wooded trough, afforded not only water, but, as in the fight at Modder River, a natural fortress, a secure shelter for the cattle and horses, and a covered passage from one part of the position to the other.* At any rate he was

* For a description of the bed of the Modder River, see vol. ii., pp. 343, 344.

resolved to wait for developments on the morrow. If it came to the worst there would always still be time to slip away on the following night as there had been time to slip away from the indefensible hole at Bosjespan when the enemy were all round him. Meanwhile he ordered the wagons to be roughly parked together near the drift, and such of the burghers as were not too demoralized to set to work to dig a continuous series of trenches round the laager, and to improve the natural defences of the river bank. There were few of the commandants who shared Cronje's obstinate confidence. Tollie de Beer, Grobbelaar, Douthwaite and others did their utmost to urge the necessity of immediate action. Ferreira sent in a messenger suggesting that Cronje should break out northwards towards Boshof. Their remonstrances fell on deaf ears. But though Cronje was determined to stay, and enforced his obstinate will upon his reluctant subordinates, he could not prevent several hundred burghers, mostly Free Staters, slipping away from the laager in small parties during the night, a few to take part in the fighting to the east of the laager next day, most to make for their homes. De Beer, too, whose men had been out beyond Koedoesrand engaging French during the afternoon, thought it safer to let them stay where they were than to take them back to the laager for the night.

Feb. 18. Movements of M.I. 3 A.M.–5 A.M.

Long before daybreak on the 18th the British troops were on the move. The Mounted Infantry was the first to start. Soon after 3 A.M. Kitchener sent for Hannay and ordered him to take his men on to Koedoesrand Drift. An hour later the main body of the M.I.* were well on their way. It was still dark, and two squadrons of Kitchener's Horse who formed the left flank guard rode to within 400 yards of Vendutie Drift and the laager before they were surprised by a sudden burst of musketry fire from the fringe of trees along the river bank (5 A.M.). A number of them dismounted, sending back their horses, and replied to the fire, but the rest fell back hurriedly, and reformed in rear of the 6th M.I., who continued pushing on upstream. Meanwhile Bainbridge had sent a company of the 7th M.I. across

* 4th, 5th and 6th M.I., N.S.W.M.I., and Kitchener's Horse.

the river at Paardeberg Drift, and these soon drew fire from the Boers collected in some strength at the head of a sharply-defined right-angled bend in the river two miles above the drift and about two and a half below the laager. These same Boers checked Martyr, who, with the 2nd M.I., had pushed forward in the scrub along the left bank upstream of the M.I. bivouac (5 A.M.). The Highland Brigade had paraded before 4 A.M., and, as soon as Martyr was engaged, took up a position by the river bank, prepared to support if necessary. The Sixth Division, too, had paraded early, and discovering the previous night's error in direction, and ignorant of the whereabouts of the Boers, began marching back towards Paardeberg Drift.

The position at daybreak. Kitchener decides to attack at once.

Kitchener waited impatiently for the day. At 5.30 A.M. the sun rose, and revealed a sight that gladdened his eyes and dispelled all lingering fears. There, straight in front of him, like a large straggling village, lay Cronje's laager—the prize he had pursued so stubbornly through the last forty-eight hours. It lay perfectly open on the veld, almost in the centre of a shallow elliptical basin shelving gently down towards it from rising ground on every side. To left and right, at the ends of the basin, stood up the sharply-defined edges of the Paardeberg and the Koedoesrand, ten miles apart. Between them, beyond the laager, extended the series of low ridges and hummocky kopjes from which French had surprised the Boers on the day before. Similar low kopjes formed most of the southern and eastern side of the basin. But just in the centre, 4,000 yards south-east of the laager, and nearly four miles from the ridges beyond, rose a prominent rocky hill over 300 feet high, known afterwards as Kitchener's Kopje. Kitchener himself was nearly two miles due west of this kopje, near the root of a long tongue of rising ground that ran down from the edge of the basin to within 2,000 yards of the laager. Along the whole length of the basin, from north-east to south-west, ran a sinuous belt of darker green, the line of the river; in some places a mere fringe of bushes on both sides of the tree-tops which showed above the sunken river bed, in others spreading out into thickets for some hundreds of yards from the bank. It was

in this strip of green that the Boers were concealed. Of that Kitchener had no doubt. But he had not fought at Modder River, and was yet to learn the part a South African river bed could play in battle. The one thing he saw was that the Boers were in a position from which they could not escape once they were closely tackled, and he resolved to tackle them without a moment's delay. He looked round for the troops, and saw the Sixth Division marching away, back to Paardeberg Drift. Galloping across, he stopped them, and, while the infantry wheeled to the right and slowly followed, rode back to the rise, whither Kelly-Kenny had already preceded him.

He overrides Kelly-Kenny's more cautious policy.

When he arrived, Kelly-Kenny began expounding to him the plan he had formed after a brief survey of the position. That was to occupy Kitchener's Kopje with a battalion, and, if possible, mount guns on it, so as to command the whole open ground in front of the laager. The rest of the force could then be distributed in a line of defensive positions round the laager, ready to beat back any attempt Cronje might make at escaping. To Kitchener, this idea of developing a formal investment before proceeding to attack, and, after all the exertions of the last two days, running the risk that the enemy might bolt before it was completed, or that reinforcements might come up and relieve him, seemed preposterous. There was only one thing to do, and that was to tackle the enemy at once, pin him to the spot, and rush the laager. For the first time in the whole war, Fortune had given the British Army a chance of getting at its elusive enemy and inflicting really heavy losses. To waste that chance was imbecility. To seize it, to annihilate Cronje's force, and then, with the terror of his dripping sword preceding him, to march straight on Bloemfontein, was, to Kitchener's mind, the only policy worthy of a soldier.* He impatiently cut short Kelly-Kenny's exposition, and pressed for an immediate attack. From his excited and peremptory manner, Kelly-Kenny saw at once that Kitchener was determined to avail himself to the

* It was soon after this, when the attack had just begun, that Kitchener looked at his watch, and, turning to the little knot of staff officers round, said: "It is now seven o'clock. We shall be in the laager by half-past ten. I'll then load up French, and send him on to Bloemfontein at once."

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GENERAL VISCOUNT KITCHENER G.C.B., O.M., G.C.M.G.

CHIEF OF THE STAFF, SOUTH AFRICA, JAN.-NOV., 1900.

COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF, SOUTH AFRICA, NOV., 1900-JUNE, 1902.

Photo by Bassano.

full of Roberts's last message defining his position. With the enemy in front, it was no occasion for a contest for authority, and Kelly-Kenny felt in loyalty bound to acquiesce in any positive suggestions Kitchener made to him. But his acquiescence did not extend to the acceptance of Kitchener's spirit or point of view. He remained unconvinced, and for the rest of the day, though he yielded to Kitchener, he cannot be said to have supported him. To understand that is essential to understanding the battle of Paardeberg.

Guns in action; infantry attack begins. 6.30–7 A.M.

The Sixth Division had by now (6.30 A.M.) reached the rise, the 18th Brigade leading, with the Welsh Regiment as advance guard. Half of the last named battalion was at once sent down along the eastern slope of the rise to support and, if possible, extricate the squadrons of Kitchener's Horse still lying in front of the laager. The remaining half, together with the Essex, were ordered north-east to clear the river bank upstream of the laager and to support the Mounted Infantry, who were now working up towards Koedoesrand; but two companies of the Essex were detached in the direction of Kitchener's Kopje, which, as a matter of fact, was already being occupied by the 4th M.I.* These measures were sufficient to prevent any attempt of the Boers to break out eastward, at any rate on the southern bank. Meanwhile the 76th and 81st Batteries had come into action on the rise at 2,700 yards' range, speedily silencing the Boer guns, and working considerable havoc in the laager, where they set fire to the wagons and blew up several wagon-loads of ammunition. The sight only inflamed Kitchener's eagerness to be into the laager without delay. The Yorkshires, who had escorted the guns, were sent forward towards the end of the rise. The leading battalions of the 13th Brigade had by now also come up on their left, and were extended by Knox in attack formation; the Oxfordshire Light Infantry on the right, the West Ridings on the left and rather in front of them, and half the Buffs in support. The rest of the Buffs, the Gloucesters and 8th M.I. were for the

* These companies were originally intended to occupy the kopje, but do not seem actually to have ascended it, and were near Stinkfontein when they were called away with the rest of their battalion.

present still behind guarding the baggage. The whole line faced, not straight towards the laager, where it would have had to cross 2,000 yards of absolutely coverless open, but more to the left towards the river bank, a mile or more below. Owing to the southward trend of the river below Vendutie Drift, the bank was much nearer at that point, and, moreover, a slight ridge with an outcrop of boulders parallel to the river offered partial cover to within 300 yards of the bank. Knox pressed forward, and by 7 A.M. the frontal attack on the river was well launched.

7 A.M.–8 A.M. Rest of force directed into action by Kitchener

But Kitchener wanted more guns and more men, and now (7 A.M.) sent a request to Colvile to push up his batteries to support those of the Sixth Division, and to order the Highland Brigade to join hands with the left of the 13th Brigade. Colvile himself, with a sound insight into the tactical situation, had intended to take his whole division across at Paardeberg Drift and to advance up the right bank, along which a general attack could undoubtedly have been delivered with far greater effect and certainty of success. He had actually begun his disposition for this move. But he had not communicated his views to Kitchener, nor did the latter in his message convey any indication of his general design, such as might have led Colvile to suggest an alternative method of executing it. It was not till 8.30 A.M., when it was becoming evident to Kitchener that the advance upon the laager from the south bank would prove a much harder task than he had at first imagined, and when the Highland Brigade were committed beyond recall, that he ordered Colvile to send the 19th Brigade and a battery across the river. Meanwhile, soon after 7 A.M., Kitchener had got into heliographic communication with French, whose guns had for some while been helping the bombardment of the laager from their positions of the previous day. French reported that there were detachments of Boers coming up from the east, and Kitchener suggested * that he should keep them off with

* French was actually the senior officer on the spot, but he was not in a position to take over the command, and, even if he had been, Roberts's letter of the 17th would have given Kitchener the same virtual authority over him as over Kelly-Kenny.

the cavalry, a suggestion which French immediately proceeded to carry out. Relieved of anxiety with regard to the Boers to the east by French's action, Kitchener now decided to make use of the Mounted Infantry and the Welsh and Essex to push directly against the laager from the east as well as from the west, and on both banks of the river. French had informed him of the existence of two bridle drifts below Koedoesrand: Banks's Drift, a mile and a half south-west of it, and Vanderberg's Drift, two miles south of Banks's and two and a half miles east of the laager. These drifts he now ordered Hannay to secure, and, crossing over by them, to push downstream towards the laager through the scrub on the right bank. Stephenson, with the Welsh and Essex, was at the same time ordered to support the Mounted Infantry along the left bank, while the 81st Battery was also sent upstream to bring an enfilading fire to bear on the laager (7.30 A.M. to 8 A.M.). These various orders, in many cases sent by Kitchener direct, in others through the intermediacy of Kelly-Kenny, completed the evolution of Kitchener's tactical scheme. If all went as he hoped, practically the whole British force would, by 10 A.M., or soon after, have worked up to within a mile of the laager, on both sides of it and on both banks of the river, ready for the final irresistible charge. How the scheme actually fared we shall now see.

Movements on eastern part of field. 7–9 A.M.

The Mounted Infantry were already scattered over a wide area when Kitchener's order reached Hannay. The 4th M.I. were in occupation of Kitchener's Kopje, where they had taken a few prisoners, and most of the rest were engaged in skirmishing to the north-east of the kopje with small parties of Boers on the ridges to the left of Stinkfontein * Farm. The 6th M.I., however, were by the river, and De Lisle, after some sharp fighting, successfully seized both Vanderberg's and Banks's Drifts (7.30–8.30 A.M.). At the former drift he crossed over two companies, keeping one on the left bank. At the latter, where he now joined hands with a squadron of 12th Lancers,

* In most accounts of the battle, and of subsequent operations, this farm has been called by the name of the adjoining farm, Osfontein, a substitution apparently due to official delicacy.

he posted a company on either bank, facing upstream, as the Boers were in possession of the Koedoesrand and of both banks of the river for some distance below it. Meanwhile Colonel Banfield had, under a fairly heavy shrapnel and rifle fire, pushed forward four companies of the Welsh to within 1,000 yards of the laager, where the road, worn down by traffic a foot or so below the level of the veld, afforded welcome shelter. Under cover of their fire, some of the irregulars managed to get back, but not a few remained lying in front of the laager till nightfall. The other half battalion subsequently prolonged the right of the leading four companies along the track. On receipt of Kitchener's order to advance eastwards and support the M.I. (7.30 A.M.), Banfield moved his men to the right down to the river, and, following the windings of the banks, took them to Vanderberg's Drift. The two companies, however, on his extreme left, which had pushed some distance beyond the road, he was compelled to leave behind. These, after suffering pretty heavily, eventually fell back about halfway to Kitchener's Kopje, where they remained waiting for orders till next morning. The Essex, meanwhile, were moving eastwards across the veld a mile or more south of the Welsh.

Hannay and Stephenson engaged with Boers to the east. 9-10.30 A.M.

Finding the Mounted Infantry engaged with Boer skirmishers, evidently in some strength, on the ridges extending from Stinkfontein towards Koedoesrand, Stephenson, to whom Kitchener had failed to convey any more definite impression of his intentions than that he was to support Hannay, drew up his available men in a long line facing eastwards and extending from Vanderberg's Drift to Stinkfontein, with the Welsh on the left and Essex on the right (9 A.M.). While this movement was in progress the 81st Battery came up and, unlimbering about 1,000 yards west of Vanderberg's Drift, opened fire on the laager. It had hardly begun when, suddenly, it found itself heavily shelled by two guns on a ridge directly in its rear. Commandant Steyn of Bethlehem had been marching post-haste from Bloemfontein with these guns and several hundred burghers, the advanced guard of the reinforcement which Cronje had

called for before leaving Magersfontein. Arriving too late to join hands with Cronje, he at once proceeded to reinforce the small parties on the eastern ridges, and now proclaimed his presence to Cronje and to the British in this startling fashion. His boldness, indeed, had carried him a little too far. For the 81st, swinging round, opened so heavy and accurate a fire on his guns as to silence them completely. An attempt to get them away was given up after 14 mules in the teams were killed, and the guns were left till nightfall, when they were removed in a damaged condition and sent back to Petrusburg to be repaired. Supported by their artillery, the British infantry and M.I. now took the aggressive, occupying Stinkfontein and working forward on their right, and by 10.30 A.M. were preparing to turn the Boers out of the whole line of their positions, which, in spite of the arrival of further reinforcements of Ferreira's men, who had crossed the river at Koedoesrand and Makow's Drifts, they were already showing signs of abandoning.

Effect of the diversion.

All the same, Steyn's prompt attack had fully served its purpose. For nearly two hours it occupied almost the whole of the British troops east of the laager, and prevented them from carrying out the attack assigned to them in Kitchener's plan at the one moment when it could have been really effective, namely, when the rest of the force were pressing against the laager from the west. And apart from losing the advantage of pressing the attack simultaneously from both sides, the delay on the eastern side was especially unfortunate, as it gave the Boers, who had made practically no preparations to resist an attack from that quarter, time to pull themselves together and to select or improve defensive positions. Unfortunate as the diversion was, it is difficult to blame either Hannay or Stephenson for devoting their attention to this new, though not very formidable, enemy in the absence of much clearer and more precise indications of the part they were required to play in the attack than they had, apparently, received either from Kitchener or from Kelly-Kenny. What is more than clear from the effect produced by Steyn's comparatively feeble attack is that the British positions east of the laager would have been quite untenable

if the main body of the Boers with Cronje had not been kept completely occupied by the attack from the south and west. In other words, the failure, owing to unforeseen circumstances, of a most important part of Kitchener's tactical scheme is the best vindication of the soundness of his general decision to attack the laager without delay.

The frontal attack of Yorkshires and 13th Brigade. Knox wounded. 7 A.M.–noon.

We must now turn back to the development of the main attack. On the right of the line the Yorkshires had pushed forward down the gentle slope in the teeth of a murderous fire. Officers and men fell freely, Colonel Bowles one of the first to be wounded, but the ragged line pressed on, and towards 9 A.M. had reached the cover of the little ridge facing the river. On their left the Oxfordshire Light Infantry, and beyond these the West Ridings, the latter extended to ten paces' interval, pressed on with equal resolution and success. The steady advance of the British, and the heavy fire they were now able to pour in at close range, was too much for the Boers on the left bank, who began abandoning their rifle-pits and slipping away under shelter of the bank. Now was the moment for the British to press home. Major Fearon and Captain Ferrar, of the Yorkshires, led a charge of some 60 of their own men, with a handful of stray Buffs, across the open, and with some loss reached the river bank. A section of the Oxfordshire L.I. did the same. The West Ridings were even more successful. The whole centre of their firing-line fixed bayonets and, charging forward, gained the bank, and were eventually joined by the mass of the battalion. The river was deep and rapid, and a crossing would have been a matter of no small difficulty, though one man, Sergeant Cook, of the West Ridings, made his way across and was killed in the trenches opposite. In any case, whether to effect a crossing or to aid the movements of the Ninth Division on the left, it was essential to bring every available rifle into action on the bank in order to keep down the Boer fire from the other side. Unfortunately, at this juncture (9.30 A.M.) Knox was wounded, and, some time after, orders arrived from Kelly-Kenny for the frontal attack not to be pushed any further. The parties already on the bank, too weak to hold their own effectively against the Boer rifle-

men opposite, took cover behind the bushes or in the winding dongas running up from the river's edge, and ceased, for lack of support, to be a determining factor in the action.

MacDonald orders Highland Brigade to attack. 7.45 A.M.

To the left of Knox's brigade the attack opened somewhat later, but developed with even greater rapidity. On receipt of Kitchener's request for support, MacDonald at 7.15 A.M. ordered his battalions to move out of their bivouac in single file, at four paces' interval, and rode off himself with the howitzer battery, which came into action at 7.45 A.M. on the western slope of the rise to the left of the 76th Battery. The 82nd Battery had started in the same direction. But Colvile had observed a large force of Boers moving down from the laager and posting themselves in a long donga and strip of brushwood that ran north-westwards from the angle of the bend, and had recalled it in order to clear them out of this position, whose importance he at once divined. The battery came into action near a little kopje due south of the bend, known afterwards as Signal Hill, which Colvile selected as his headquarters for the day. Meanwhile the infantry had marched out. The Black Watch were next to the river; behind them, somewhat more to the east, were the Argyll and Sutherlands, while the Seaforths were in rear. MacDonald's original idea was to move these three lines out in échelon, so that eventually, when they turned to their left and fronted the river, the Seaforths should be on the right and the Argyll and Sutherlands in the middle. But the latter regiment moved off so rapidly that Colonel Wilson, with the leading half battalion, was already across the rise in rear of the West Ridings before the Seaforths came up. The Seaforths thus became second line, though not for long. No sooner had the long lines of Highlanders begun defiling across the level between their bivouac and the rise than the Boers in the river bed opposite opened a heavy fire upon them. Instinctively officers and men began turning towards the fire, and as soon as the first companies reached the rise, MacDonald gave the word and let them go.

Highland attack. 7.45–9 A.M.

Fully justified as was MacDonald's confidence in his men, and splendid as was his own fighting spirit, the wisdom of his decision is certainly open to grave doubt. The strip of

ground, bounded on the right by the rise and on the left by the river below the bend, down which the Highlanders now advanced, offered not the slightest vestige of cover. Once they were committed to the attack, any possibility of extricating the troops or changing their direction, even of communicating orders to them, was out of the question. Steadily the long line pressed forward against the horizontal sleet of bullets. Before long the Seaforths were up in the firing-line, which was still further thickened in the centre by the rear companies of the Argyll and Sutherlands, which had been escorting the guns, and which MacDonald now gradually sent forward to strengthen the attack, and on the right by overlapping with Knox's battalions. In places the intervals were reduced to barely two paces. The plain soon began to be dotted with prostrate kilted figures, the wreckage of the attack, and at about 500–600 yards from the river bank the advance came to a standstill. As had also been the case in the advance of Kelly-Kenny's battalions, the Boer fire was less accurate now than at the longer range, and the chief danger was faced by supports and ammunition carriers. All the same, the splendid forward impetus of the Highlanders was completely spent (9 A.M.).

Some of Highlanders cross river, while a few reach the bank on the right. MacDonald wounded. 9 A.M.–noon.

Before this MacDonald had begun to realize his mistake, and had sent Major Urmston, his brigade-major, to bring the left hand companies of the Black Watch and Seaforths, which were in the scrub by the river bank, forward along the bank and in the river bed, in order to ease the pressure on the troops in the open and to help their advance. Taking with them some of Martyr's M.I., these companies now pushed forward, the advanced parties of Boers falling back before them to the large donga at the bend. Seeing something which he took for a Boer gun on the opposite bank, Captain Stewart, of the Black Watch, determined to cross over and seize it. The river was running high, but Piper Cameron very gallantly attempted to find a passage. He was successful, and under a heavy fire two companies of the Black Watch and one of the Seaforths waded through the breast-high current some 800 yards below the bend, not without loss (9 A.M.). On the far bank they formed to the

right, and proceeded to make their way through the scrub towards the Boer main position in the donga. On their left were the 7th M.I., the rest of whom Bainbridge had taken across soon after 7 A.M., and who had, with great determination and very heavy loss, been sustaining an independent fight in the scrub against steadily-increasing forces of the enemy. A little later, MacDonald, observing some men still unoccupied on the extreme left rear, sent his aide-de-camp, Captain Whigham, to bring them forward. These, too, about a company each of Black Watch and Seaforths, were taken across by Whigham at a point about a mile above Paardeberg Drift, and moved up to support the men with Stewart, on whose left they eventually extended. The leading three companies, advancing in admirable style, had got within 300 yards of the donga when, most unfortunately, they received the order to stop, as they were masking the fire of the men on the south bank. Had these companies been properly supported instead of checked, and the fire from the other bank been diverted, or even neglected, their gallant enterprise might have secured a tangible success. As it was, they to some slight extent effected MacDonald's immediate purpose. The left of the Highlanders on the open pushed forward a little, and a company of Argyll and Sutherlands managed to lodge themselves in a small kraal near the bank within 400 yards of the bend. But the centre of the line could make no further progress, though in consequence of an appeal for reinforcements sent by MacDonald at 9.45 A.M., Colvile sent forward four companies of the Cornwall L.I., who had been guarding the baggage. On the right, however, where the Yorkshires and 13th Brigade reached the river, small parties of all three Highland regiments pushed in among them from 9 A.M. on till after midday. At 10 A.M. MacDonald, who had just returned to the howitzers from the river bed, was wounded in the foot, and the command, as at Magersfontein, once more devolved on Hughes-Hallett, of the Seaforths, who was also wounded, but not sufficiently to incapacitate him from acting. As a matter of fact, no action was required. The Highland Brigade had shot its bolt, and the exhausted men remained lying where they were till dusk.

19th Brigade in action across the river. 10.15–noon.

Before the Highland advance first came to a standstill, the 19th Brigade had begun crossing at Paardeberg Drift. The Shropshire L.I. and 82nd Battery crossed first, followed by the Gordons and Canadians. By 10.15 A.M. the crossing was completed. The Canadians wheeled to the right, and advanced across perfectly open ground in the direction of the laager. Their advance would have been far more effective if it had followed the river bank, but there seems to have been no one to direct them. As it was they never got as far as the three advanced companies of Highlanders, but were checked at a distance of from 500 to 800 yards from the donga, their right getting furthest forward. As the Canadians came up, Bainbridge gradually withdrew most of his exhausted mounted infantrymen to Paardeberg Drift. Two companies of Shropshires who had been left on the south bank were subsequently sent across by Colvile, and supported the Highlanders and Canadians on this side. Meanwhile, Smith-Dorrien cautiously led his remaining two battalions round by a wide sweep further west.* About 11.15 three companies of the Shropshires deployed in front of Gun Hill, the low kopje about 900 yards north of the long donga. The Gordons, moving in rear of Gun Hill, deployed beyond these, their extreme left being within 1,300 yards of the laager, and joined hands with the cavalry. The 82nd Battery first opened fire from a point north of the Paardeberg, and early in the afternoon was moved round to the west of Gun Hill to enfilade the Boers in the donga. This had been done since 11 A.M. with excellent effect by the Maxim gun of the Canadians which Lieutenant Bell had independently taken off to Gun Hill.

Smith-Dorrien's purely defensive policy. Deficiencies of communication.

Nothing can be more typical of the want of clear direction or mutual comprehension on this day than the handling of the 19th Brigade. The general attitude of both Colvile and Smith-Dorrien towards the problem before them was much the same as Kelly-Kenny's, and in this particular instance Smith-Dorrien seems to have had no other idea of the object of his movement than that it was to complete the

* This was on Smith-Dorrien's own initiative. Colvile's orders had simply been for him to work up on the right bank.

line round the laager, and prevent the Boers breaking out. What Kitchener's general idea was is clear enough, but he does not seem to have realized that he had entirely failed to impress it upon the men he was dealing with. He gave no precise tactical instructions which would have made up for this failure, and apparently never discovered what Smith-Dorrien was really doing. Smith-Dorrien, on the other hand, seems to have been equally ignorant of MacDonald's attack, or, at least, of its object and of the extent to which it had succeeded. Otherwise he could hardly, his general attitude notwithstanding, have failed to appreciate what a magnificent opportunity presented itself to him for driving away or even completely destroying the Boer right flank in the donga, if only he pushed a determined enveloping advance against it with the Shropshires and Gordons. And thus, partly owing to MacDonald's precipitancy, partly to Smith-Dorrien's slowness and purely defensive attitude, but still more to the lack of clear orders, to the absence of a common tactical theory between all concerned, and to the deficiencies of intercommunication,* the whole energies of the Ninth Division were frittered away.

Kitchener orders Hannay and Stephenson back against laager. 11 A.M.

Absorbed in the breathlessly exciting combat in front of him, Kitchener had for the time being rather lost sight of the doings of Hannay and Stephenson to the east. But towards 10 A.M. he began to realize that he had spent two of his four brigades without apparently producing any effect, except, perhaps, drawing the main attention of the Boers, and that only a strong diversion above the laager would enable the western attack to make further headway. Anxiously his eyes turned upstream, whence the intermittent firing of De Lisle's men could be heard, but saw no signs of the compressing attack along both banks which ought by now to have got quite close to the laager. At this juncture, Captain Maurice of Kelly-Kenny's staff rode up and reported

* Kitchener, impatient at what he thought Smith-Dorrien's slowness at attacking, was very anxious to signal across, but the day was cloudy, and the heliograph could only be worked intermittently. Why no gallopers were sent does not appear; possibly the few available were already occupied, possibly the river was considered too swollen to send them across.

that Hannay and Stephenson were operating eastwards from Stinkfontein. At Kitchener's request, Kelly-Kenny at once sent Maurice with orders to Stephenson to disregard the Boers to the east and press the attack on the laager. But Kitchener was not going to trust to orders. He galloped over himself, saw both Stephenson and Hannay, and made quite clear to them what he had not made clear before, that they were to press down both banks and take the laager. The Boers to the east were to be left to themselves, or rather to French, who, so Kitchener assumed, had undertaken to look after them. As it happened, French had his hands fully occupied holding the northern end of the Koedoesrand against the increasing numbers of Ferreira's men, and, though Kitchener suggested somewhat later that he should bring the cavalry over to the south bank, he thought it wiser, especially as Gordon's brigade had not yet arrived, to remain where he was.*

Eastern positions abandoned. Hannay's and Stephenson's attack comes to a standstill. 2 P.M.

All Hannay's and Stephenson's troops were now withdrawn from their positions and marched down to the river. The 4th M.I., indeed, who had been brought down to the foot of Kitchener's Kopje before this, remained for some time skirmishing with the Boers to cover the withdrawal of the other units. But eventually they too were ordered to the river, leaving the New South Wales M.I. and a single weak squadron of Kitchener's Horse to look after the whole of the positions from Koedoesrand to Kitchener's Kopje. The 81st Battery also continued in action against the ridges and kept Steyn's men back, but only at the cost of not supporting the main attack. To remedy this the 76th Battery was subsequently moved forward to a position between Kitchener's Kopje and the nearest point of the river. Arriving at the river, Hannay crossed over at Vanderberg's Drift at noon with the 5th M.I. and a company of the 7th M.I. Joined by the three companies of De Lisle's on the right bank, the Mounted Infantry now moved some two miles down the bank, and then, leaving their

* The message was carried by Major Lord Edmund Talbot, whom French sent over to suggest to Kitchener that an attack was unnecessary, and that all that was required was to keep Cronje invested.

horses under cover, pushed up to within 700 yards of the Boer main position immediately in front of the laager (1.30 P.M.). Hannay now rode back to the drift and collected another 100 miscellaneous M.I. to reinforce his firing-line. Before returning with these, he sent off his galloper to Kitchener with a written message to the effect that it was no use attempting to push on any further. Meanwhile, on the left bank, the Essex and Welsh, picking up the two remaining companies of De Lisle's men, cut across the curve just below the drift and worked along, clearing the Boers out of the bank as they advanced. By 2 P.M. the leading companies of the Essex and the M.I., supported by some of the Welsh, succeeded in establishing themselves in a series of deep dongas running at right angles to the stream within 1,000 yards of Vendutie Drift, and about level with Hannay's men on the opposite bank. But here, too, the advance came to a standstill. The attack from the east had proved as unsuccessful as that from the south and west.

Cornwalls and Welsh and Essex transferred to N. bank for last desperate assault. Kitchener's order to Hannay.

But even this second failure was not enough to shake Kitchener's determination to get into the laager that day. The troops were in close touch with the enemy at every point. If only they could be rallied and once more set moving forward, the goal might yet be attained. He had long ago begun to realize that it was on the north bank that his best chance of success lay, and he now resolved to see what could be done, by appeals to the generals and by fresh reinforcements, to revive the attack on that side. Shortly before 2 P.M. he rode over—for the first time that day—to see Colvile, made clear to him that he wished the Boer position carried at all costs, and asked him to send all available reinforcements to strengthen Smith-Dorrien. Colvile had nothing left in hand but half a battalion of the Cornwalls with the baggage; these he ordered to cross over and rush the Boers out of the donga, but at Colonel Aldworth's suggestion he deferred the attack to give the famished men time to have a meal. Returning to the rise, Kitchener now urged upon Kelly-Kenny the necessity of making another effort with his troops. Kelly-Kenny had been averse to the

attack from the first; he had watched its progress with consternation, and he had long ago abandoned any slight hope he may have had of its succeeding. But in view of Roberts's letter, he felt he had no other choice but to yield to what he thought Kitchener's madness, at least as regards Stephenson's brigade, for he absolutely refused to sanction a renewed attempt to press home the frontal attack of Knox's brigade. Reluctantly he wrote an order to Stephenson to extricate as many of his men as he could, take them across at Vanderberg's Drift, and attack the laager from the right bank. Kitchener, too, rode across once more and, explaining to Stephenson what he wanted done, urged him to use his utmost efforts to get into the laager with the bayonet. While on this part of the field he received Hannay's message. He at once sent back the following characteristic reply:

"The time has now come for a final effort. All troops have been warned that the laager must be rushed at all costs. Try and carry Stephenson's brigade on with you. But if they cannot go, the M.I. should do it. Gallop up if necessary and fire into the laager."

Hannay's charge. 3.30 P.M.

Hannay received the message about 3 P.M., after he had returned to a point near the firing-line, now within some 500 yards of the Boer position. From its somewhat vague wording he seems to have gathered nothing except the conviction that Kitchener was determined that he should throw away the lives of his men in an impossible attempt. The message gave no indication of the time at which the charge was to take place, no reference to the orders sent to Stephenson, or to the fact that the infantry were crossing the river, and Hannay made no effort to find out or to work out the details of a plan for himself. Utterly exhausted by his exertions, overcome by the strain of the fighting, goaded to desperation by the fashion in which Kitchener had driven him for the last two days, he could think of nothing to do but to obey the wording of the last sentence in the order, gallop at the laager, and satisfy his relentless taskmaster by at least getting killed himself. Sending away his staff on various pretexts — one to bring the 4th M.I.

across the river, another to convey a copy of Kitchener's order to De Lisle—he got together a handful of men, perhaps fifty at the outside, made them mount the led horses of the 6th M.I. just in rear, and suddenly galloped at their head straight for the laager. Passing through the prostrate line of M.I. in front, he shouted to them to follow, and, thanks to the diversion caused by his charge, a number of them were able to reach a slight fold in the ground within 300 yards of the Boer position. He himself rode steadily on, his little following dwindling away behind him, till he fell, riddled with bullets, right inside the enemy's line. Thus ended a gallant, if unfortunate, soldier. No event of that fateful 18th had a deeper effect upon the army at the time, and evoked more sympathy, than Hannay's death, for all recognized its dramatic significance as a protest against Kitchener's indifference to life. None the less, the historian must admit that Hannay's desperate act of self-sacrifice was a failure to comply with the spirit of his instructions, and the very measure of success which, even so, it managed to achieve would indicate that Kitchener was justified in believing that the laager could be carried by a really determined assault.

Failure of the Essex and Welsh attack. 5.30–6.30 P.M.

The 4th M.I. crossed the river about 3.30 P.M., and while doing so heard the renewed outburst of firing which accompanied Hannay's charge. Moving to the north-west, they joined the right of the Mounted Infantry firing-line, eventually extending as far round as the track from Vendutie Drift to Kameelfontein. The Welsh and Essex, half a battalion of each, crossed soon after, and were formed up behind a slight rise about 1,000 yards in rear of the M.I. in readiness for the attack, which Stephenson decided to make at 5.30 P.M. The Welsh, in three lines extended to ten-pace intervals, were in front; the Essex were in support. As soon as the advance crossed the rise it came under a heavy fire. The men continued steadily by rushes of alternate half companies, and the three lines soon merged into one. At about 600 yards from the Boer position, and 300 yards in rear of the Mounted Infantry, Colonel Banfield fell wounded, and the advance was checked.

The Essex, who before this had made their way down a donga into the river bed, and had worked up level with the Welsh, managed to get a little further forward. At this juncture Major Brown, commanding the Essex, came to the conclusion that an attack across the remaining stretch of open was impossible, and ordered both battalions to retire (6.30 P.M.). In view of the stringency of Kitchener's orders, this decision seems somewhat questionable, especially as it was almost dusk, and as De Lisle with the Mounted Infantry was still lying some way in front of the infantry, waiting for their arrival to join in the assault—though this last fact was probably not realized by the infantry at the time. The casualties in the companies engaged had been moderately heavy, probably between 10 and 15 per cent., but nothing that would indicate an attempt to rush the laager "at all costs." Stephenson had meanwhile ordered some R.E. over the river, and these prepared a shelter trench for the retiring infantry about a mile in rear, where they remained for the night.

The Cornwalls charge 5.15 P.M. Smith-Dorrien's inaction.

The attack from the west coincided almost exactly, as Kitchener had hoped, with that from the east. Crossing the river at about 3.30 P.M. at the point where Stewart had crossed in the morning, and taking along with them a company of the 2nd M.I., the Cornwalls reached the firing-line of the Canadians about an hour later. Aldworth now consulted with Colonel Otter of the Canadians, and with the officers of the Highlander and M.I. companies who were mixed up with the Canadian right, and arranged for the general attack to take place at 5.15 P.M. The three companies of Cornwalls now got ready, fixed bayonets, and at the word "charge" raced forward, cheering wildly. In front of them lay over 700 yards of absolutely coverless open. A tremendous fire at once opened on them, but with magnificent spirit the Cornwalls pressed forward, Aldworth at their head, cheering them on and inspiring them with his own splendid courage. Nearly half the ground had been covered. But men and officers were falling fast. And now Aldworth fell, cheering on his men with his last breath. The scattered remnants of the line

threw themselves down exhausted, and waited for a fresh advance from behind to carry them forward again. But no such advance was made. A considerable number of Canadians and Highlanders had joined in the charge, but there had been no real general advance of the men lying about in this part of the field. A second charge over the same ground was, at that moment, at any rate, almost out of the question. But it might, perhaps, have been attempted as soon as the light began to fail. What really rendered Aldworth's death and the gallantry of his men of no avail was the absence of all support on the flank. The Highlanders on the extreme right, who were already nearer the donga than the Cornwalls ever reached, do not seem to have been warned to join in. But they were only a handful. What is really inexplicable is that Smith-Dorrien, who had one and a half almost intact battalions in hand, received no information either from Kitchener or from Colvile of what was intended. The first he knew of any attack was the actual sight of the Cornwalls rushing across the open, a sight which filled him with consternation. Even so, it seems somewhat surprising that he did not attempt to join in. He had not long before this advanced his left a little to take the pressure of the enemy's fire off the Highlanders on the opposite bank, and was in a very favourable position for an enveloping assault to be carried home at dusk. But here, as at every point of the field, the absence of organized direction, of an efficient system of intercommunication, and of a common spirit, made themselves felt with fatal effect.

Gordon occupies the Koedoesrand. De Wet seizes Kitchener's Kopje.

While the last British attacks were vainly spending themselves against the trenches on the right bank, events were happening across the river which suddenly altered the whole character of the situation. The withdrawal of Stephenson and Hannay had encouraged Steyn's and Ferreira's men to re-occupy the ridges they had been in the act of quitting, but, fortunately, they lacked the enterprise to make any really vigorous offensive movement. Towards 5 P.M., indeed, their attention was diverted by a new danger which threatened their right flank. Gordon, who had left Kimberley with his brigade that morning, was now coming down the main road,

passing east of the Koedoesrand. Afraid of being cut off, the Boers on the Koedoesrand made no serious opposition, and by nightfall Gordon had secured both the heights and the drift at their foot. But at the same moment that Gordon appeared on the scene at Koedoesrand, a new factor made itself felt on the Boer left in the shape of De Wet and Philip Botha with some 600 men. Starting from Koffyfontein soon after midnight and making straight for Koedoesrand, they had reached the neighbourhood of Stinkfontein before they saw, through the gap in the ridges, Cronje's laager and the British troops hemming it round on every side, and evidently preparing for an assault. To create an immediate diversion seemed essential. The farm in front and the hill to the left (Kitchener's Kopje) seemed only weakly held, while, to the right, parties of burghers could be seen keeping up a desultory fire. Sending Botha with half his men against Stinkfontein, De Wet himself led the rest against Kitchener's Kopje. The handful of Kitchener's Horse occupied with the Boers to the east of them seem to have been completely surprised by this new attack. Their horses, which were near the farm, were at once stampeded. Some fifty men got together to hold the farm buildings. But after no very long resistance, those who remained unwounded hoisted the white flag and surrendered. De Wet meanwhile occupied the hill without opposition. No information of these doings seems to have reached either Kitchener or Kelly-Kenny, and, indeed, the state of affairs at headquarters itself was at that moment one of no little confusion.

Boers open fire on the transport and on the batteries.

With a view to the night, the transport of the Sixth Division had been ordered up from the bivouac to the headquarters' rise. No sooner had it come within sight of the river, when one of the pom-poms in the laager, which had been silent for some hours past, suddenly opened on it, and then, by way of a further diversion, sent a string of shells right in the middle of Kelly-Kenny's staff and into an operating tent full of wounded. Aided by Captain Booth and other staff officers, Major Vandeleur managed to get together some of the panic-stricken "boys," and to take the jumbled transport back under cover; the wounded meanwhile hopped, crawled, or

were carried out of harm's way. All the attention of the staff was kept occupied by this incident and by the two attacks which developed immediately after, with the result that it was not till 6 P.M. that it was fully realized at headquarters that the Boers held the whole of the line from Koedoesrand to Kitchener's Kopje—of whose evacuation Kitchener had never vouchsafed Kelly-Kenny any information—and were pouring in a heavy rifle-fire, aided by a gun and a pom-pom at Stinkfontein and another gun further east, into the rear of the 76th and 81st Batteries, whose guns were now facing in three different directions. Several companies of the Buffs who had been moved up to support the Yorkshires, and most of the Gloucesters, were at once ordered to form line facing Kitchener's Kopje, and drive off the Boers. With the assistance of the 76th Battery, they kept down the Boer fire, but, as they had not advanced beyond the foot of the hill by dusk, they were ordered to intrench themselves there for the night. Some sixty men of the 8th M.I. had at the same time been sent round to Stinkfontein. Coming under a heavy fire from Kitchener's Kopje and from the farm, they were forced to dismount hurriedly and take up such position as they could among some slight rocky hummocks, where they held their own till dark, having lost half their number in killed, wounded and prisoners, and all their horses. Meanwhile the 81st Battery was in serious danger. Receiving an order to retire, it had begun limbering up when it immediately came under a tremendous rifle and pom-pom fire, which killed most of the horses. An attempt to rush the battery was frustrated by a party of the Essex under Lieutenant Parsons, who displayed exceptional gallantry and promptitude on this occasion,* and by a number of odds and ends of other units which Captain Maurice hurriedly collected. At dark, Steyn's men tried once again, but were kept off, and the battery successfully withdrawn.

Exhaustion of British at nightfall.

Night fell upon a scene of confusion and exhaustion. Before the last attacks had been delivered, Kitchener had decided that, if they failed, the troops should everywhere intrench themselves at the furthest points reached—the

* Lieutenant Parsons was recommended for the Victoria Cross.

13th Brigade making their way down to the river bank—in readiness to renew the attack on the morrow. But in the general upset following De Wet's counter-attack, no orders could be written or sent, and most of the units were withdrawn after dark by their brigadiers or colonels, only a few, such as the West Ridings on the left and the Highland companies on the right bank, remaining where they were till the morning.* The men were utterly exhausted. They had been marching at full speed for the last twenty-four hours before the battle. None of them had had more than a few hours' sleep, and the 19th Brigade had only arrived an hour before the action began. After a hurried meal, in many cases no meal, they had been fighting now for twelve hours or more. Whether, even in the absence of the Boer counter-stroke, they would have been able to carry out a last general attack at dusk, if such an attack had been attempted, is perhaps questionable. Certain it is that the attempt was not made, and that no one, except, perhaps, Kitchener, even thought of making it.

Boers equally exhausted; not in a state to attempt escape.

But if the British were exhausted, the Boers in the laager were hardly less so. They, too, had been hard pressed for two days, and all through the 18th they had fought like rats in a trap. More than once their defence had nearly given way. On the east the British attack had got close to the laager on both banks, and only wanted a little extra weight to have got home. On the west the comparative immunity of their position was due solely to the stubborn determination of the few hundred men in the great donga by the bend. Almost completely surrounded, subjected to shell, maxim and rifle-fire from every quarter, they had stuck grimly to their natural fortification all day. But even they fully realized that their position was, in the long run, untenable if the British only chose to close in upon their flanks and rear, and as soon as darkness came on they abandoned their positions and fell back towards the laager. Here everything was in confusion. Hundreds of dead oxen and horses were

* Colvile, indeed, had already ordered the Highlanders to withdraw as soon as the Cornwalls' attack failed, an order which could not be executed at the time.

lying about; hundreds more had escaped across the veld; whole groups of wagons had been burnt, blown up or wrecked. Women with blanched faces were giving what help they could to the wounded, for the doctors had been left behind at Bosjespan; terror-stricken children were quietly whimpering for their parents. To have initiated any fresh plan on such a night was almost an impossibility. In a sense it is true that even now, by abandoning all, or nearly all his wagons, Cronje could have broken through with his men to join De Wet. But it is very improbable that Cronje realized in the least what had been happening outside just when the attack upon him was being pressed most closely. And, even if he had, it was not in him or in his men to make the attempt. To carry out such a sortie required a discipline, a venturesomeness, a physical and moral freshness, which Kitchener's repeated attacks had long ago hammered out of them. Whatever might have been done the night before, or attempted the night after, the Boers on the night of the 18th were not in a state to think of anything except continuing the defence as they had begun it, and within narrower limits. The most the more energetic spirits could rise to was improving the trenches—a new trench was dug about half a mile below the laager on the right bank—and removing some of the ammunition and stores in the wagons to places of security under the bank, in readiness for the renewal of the attack on the morrow. If they survived that attack, or the British failed to deliver it, they might hope to hold on till relieved from outside. In other words, the Boers were beaten, and they knew it.

Casualties on 18th.

The total British casualties on this day were 20 officers and 300 men killed or died of wounds, and 52 officers and 890 men wounded, or 1,262 in all, roughly 8 per cent. of the 15,000 troops on the field. These were the highest casualties of any one day's fighting in the war, though it is worth noting that the number of those actually killed was less than at Spion Kop. They cannot be called heavy casualties either in their totals or in their incidence upon units.* Their dis-

* There can be no comparison between these figures and those of British losses in the Peninsula, or even of more recent battles in India

tribution among the brigades was fairly even, the heaviest losers being the Highland Brigade with 346 casualties, or about 14 per cent. of their strength, and the lightest the 13th Brigade with 180, or about 5 per cent. Of individual units, the largest totals fell upon the Seaforths with 155, the Yorkshires with 130, and the West Ridings with 122. The heaviest sufferers proportionately to the men engaged were the companies of the 7th M.I. on the north bank, who lost 30 per cent. of their strength, and the half battalion of Cornwalls who charged over the same ground later, losing 22 per cent. The cavalry casualties were practically *nil*. The total Boer losses were naturally much less, owing to their defensive position and the excellent cover they enjoyed.* Nevertheless, they probably amounted to over 300, and, if so, were proportionately nearly as high as the British.

Justification of Kitchener's decision to attack.

The battle of Paardeberg has been criticized from two main points of view: firstly, that Kitchener's decision to attack was mistaken, because the object aimed at could have been equally well attained by the defensive occupation of surrounding positions which would have barred Cronje's escape; and secondly, that the attack itself was faulty in its design, and ill-timed, spasmodic and confused in its execution. To appreciate the bearing of the first criticism it is essential

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and the Crimea, as is shown by the following table, taken from Sir H. Maxwell's 'Life of Wellington':—

—	Year.	British Troops engaged.	Casualties.	Percentage.
Talavera	1809	20,500	6,250	30 per cent.
Albuera	1811	8,200	3,990	48 ,,
Waterloo	1815	23,991	6,932	29 ,,
Chillianwallah . .	1849	15,000	2,388	15 ,,
Inkermann . . .	1854	7,464	2,357	31 ,,

* They were afterwards officially admitted as about 100 killed and 250 wounded for the whole period from Cronje's flight to his surrender. As the casualties of the 16th, and of the siege, were very slight, it is probable that a total of 400-450 casualties for the whole period, and 300-350 for the 18th, would be a fair estimate.

for the reader to envisage the situation as it presented itself to Lord Kitchener at the moment when he first caught sight of Cronje's laager. All he knew was that he had in front of him the wagons and a substantial portion of a force whose total was estimated at 10,000 men. What proportion of that force had pushed ahead, what reinforcements were hurrying up from Kimberley, Bloemfontein or the south, he had no means of knowing. A message from Roberts on the previous day had informed him that 2,000 men were on their way from Colesberg and Ladysmith. He may well have conjectured that Ferreira with 2,000–3,000 more would likewise be attempting to join Cronje, and could know nothing of his being scared out of his way by French on the previous day. As far as available estimates went, he might have to reckon, even at the end of a few hours, with 12,000–15,000 Boers in all, in other words, with a force fully as large as his own.* But for the immediate moment only a part of that force was opposed to him, a part which, apparently, was so demoralized by its flight, as to have allowed French, with an insignificant force, to hold it up and shell it, and which had now gone to earth in a position whence it could not hope to extricate itself if once fairly tackled. Now, if ever, was the moment for delivering a crushing blow, for breaking the spirit of the Boers, and raising that of the British, by the infliction of really heavy losses. Once missed, even by an hour, the golden opportunity might not present itself again. The marching powers of his men had been taxed to the utmost. Supplies were in a most precarious condition. If Cronje got away there could be no question of repeating the marches of the last twenty-four hours: the pursuit would have ended in failure. But if Cronje were destroyed the elation of victory and the spoils of the laager might carry on the British troops in one irresistible sweep to Bloemfontein. For a man like Kitchener there could be no two sides to the question, and it is unlikely that

* The actual Boer forces outside and within reach of Paardeberg on the 17th and 18th were fully 3,000, of whom about half came up in time to take part in the battle. In other words, Kitchener had to deal with about 7,500 men, or a force half as large as his own and French's, within the sphere of his operations.

he gave even a moment's serious thought to the alternative policy of circumsession.

Difficulties and dangers of a waiting policy.

That policy may at a first glance appear, if less promising of great results, at any rate safer than the policy of immediate attack. But even that is a very disputable point. The envelopment of the Boers, who at that moment held fully five miles of the river bed, would have required an investing line of nearly twenty miles. Apart from the difficulties of conveying supplies and water to the troops, their position, scattered along such a line, with an unbroken Boer force within, and a large and rapidly increasing Boer force outside, would have been precarious in the extreme. In fact a quite conceivable result of an attempt to carry out on the 18th the cordon policy adopted after the battle would have been a simultaneous attack from both sides on all positions east of the laager, ending in the hurried withdrawal of such troops as could be extricated, and the surrender of the rest. Nevertheless this idea of sitting round the Boers and then reducing them by a methodical series of attacks, or, better still, by the joint effects of shell-fire and famine, was the one that commended itself to French, Kelly-Kenny and Colvile, in fact to almost all the senior officers present on the morning of the 18th; and the failure of the attempt to get into the laager on the first day was generally taken by them, and by the army at large, to vindicate the soundness of their judgment, and to prove that Kitchener's attack was not only unnecessary but unjustifiable. At bottom that view sprang, not from true military considerations, but from the exaggerated importance which in a generation of peace and petty wars had gradually come to be attached to avoiding casualties, and which had only been accentuated by the early failures of the South African campaign. That it should have been the generally accepted view in no way affects the fact that Kitchener was right in forcing his colleagues to attack. It is significant only as indicating the decadence of the military instinct in the higher ranks of the British Army, as exemplified even in its best representatives.

Defective carrying out of the attack.

With regard to the second criticism it must be admitted that the actual carrying out of the attack was in many

respects most defective. Two brigades out of four were thrown away in a frontal advance across almost coverless open, and from the wrong side of the river. This advance was made before either of the flank attacks could possibly have joined in. The flank attacks themselves were made with insufficient force, without determination, and disjointedly. Even when they did coincide, later in the afternoon, they lacked the support necessary to carry them through. No one quite knew what was happening. Some units remained without orders for hours, others would receive two or three different orders almost simultaneously from different authorities. Kitchener and his staff galloped about the field, and, wherever they found units or men unoccupied, hustled them forward into the scrimmage regardless of previous orders they might have received through the regular channels, and oblivious of the necessity of informing their immediate superiors of what had been done. The evacuation of Kitchener's Kopje without Kelly-Kenny's knowledge, and its undetected occupation by a considerable Boer force, was only a typical instance of the general confusion.

Kitchener's tactical inexperience.

The cause of these defects must, to a large extent, be sought in the commander himself. In his desperate eagerness to get into the laager at once, Kitchener seems to have failed to realize that, however essential it may have been to attack without delay, it was no less essential to give a few moments to considering the best line of attack, and to making his general idea perfectly clear to those who were entrusted with its execution. As it was, before he had clearly grasped the tactical situation and formed his plan, he had already committed half his force to an attack launched across the most unfavourable ground against the point where, even if successful, it would be least effective. And from first to last he never quite succeeded in making his colleagues or subordinates understand what his plan was, and what part he wished them to play in it. The fact is that with all the intuitions of a great soldier, Kitchener was still entirely inexperienced. He had neither the trained eye that can instantly frame the plan best adapted to the ground before it, nor the practical mastery of the complicated and detailed

technique essential to the tactical handling of large bodies of men in action. There was no reason why he should possess these gifts. His Egyptian career, which had won him his high position in the British Army, had afforded no opportunity for acquiring them. On the contrary, it had only fostered that disregard of organized routine, that belief in the virtue of direct and personal intervention at every point, which were displayed so conspicuously at Paardeberg.

Ambiguity of Kitchener's status. Passive resistance of other generals.

These defects were accentuated by the ambiguity of Kitchener's status on the field. Empowered to make authoritative suggestions, he was, nevertheless, not in a position to give direct and detailed orders, or to call the divisional generals and brigadiers together and inform each one what he was to do, and where he was to post himself. He had all the responsibility of command without the control of the machinery by which the will of the commander is usually transmitted. Nor had he any of the ordinary facilities of a commander in the shape of trained staff officers capable of immediately converting his ideas into precise instructions, and thus supplementing his personal deficiencies. The truth is that at the battle of Paardeberg there was neither a commander nor a directing staff in any real sense of the words. What happened was simply that Kitchener, with the help of a small personal staff and of his own fiery energy and overmastering personality, to some extent succeeded in impressing his will upon a number of scattered and uncoordinated units. All this would have mattered but little had Kitchener and his colleagues and their subordinates been trained in a common school and inspired by a common theory of war. In that case it would have been enough to have given the general idea, and to have trusted commanding officers of units to make their own dispositions in the spirit in which it was conceived. Kelly-Kenny and Colvile were probably both of them better tacticians than Kitchener, and had they been animated by Kitchener's spirit, and shared his view of what ought to be done, the battle would have been fought very differently. But, as has already been explained, their conviction, and that of more than one of their senior subordinates, was that the attack which was forced upon

LIEUT.-GENERAL SIR T. KELLY-KENNY, K.C.B.,
COMMANDING 6TH DIVISION.
Photo by Deale, Bloemfontein.

them was a mistake. With every intention to give Kitchener their loyal support they yet interposed a passive resistance which baffled even his strong will, and took all the life out of the attack. It was that passive resistance, mainly proceeding from the dread of being responsible for heavy losses, that, far more than any defects of the tactical scheme, or confusion in the orders given, was the real cause of the failure to get into the laager and annihilate the Boers on the 18th.

Excellent spirit of troops; their tactical weakness; lack of communication.

It was in the senior ranks, however, and not among the junior officers or the men, that this fear prevailed. Considering the exhaustion of the preceding marches, and the lack of sleep and food, the conduct of the troops as a whole was admirable. Whenever the appeal to do their utmost was made to them they did it with a will, and if, during that day, Kitchener may more than once have regretfully longed for a few battalions of his Sudanese, it was not that he needed braver men so much as men whose lives their generals would be less timid of throwing into the scale of battle. In actual tactical skill, indeed, the defects of the British troops were still as evident as in most of the preceding battles of the war. On the open, it is true, the advantages were all against them. But, once in the river bed or in the donga-intersected scrub on the banks, they enjoyed an equality of position with the Boers which only their lack of skill as skirmishers prevented them from utilizing more effectively. Apart from the individual defects of the British soldier as a shot and a stalker, Paardeberg displayed only too plainly a lack of systematic co-operation between artillery and infantry, and between the infantry themselves, for which the deficiencies of the higher command were only in part responsible. For much of it the fault lay in defective peace training; for still more in the failure to realize the enormous difficulties modern battle conditions have put in the way of intercommunication, and to provide for them. The difficulty of securing co-operation between the Highlanders on the right bank and the rest of MacDonald's brigade, the hours wasted by Hannay and Stephenson facing east, Smith-Dorrien's inactivity on the north, the unreported approach of

De Wet, are all instances of the results of defective intercommunication. Paardeberg, like Spion Kop, indicates that for the battles of the future, signallers, orderlies and heliographs, will be required on a far larger scale than hitherto, and that the field telegraph and telephone will play a part undreamt of before.*

Paardeberg the best fought battle in the war.

The defects in the conduct of the battle of Paardeberg are patent. But, after all is said and done, it remains the best conducted and most successful engagement on a large scale in the whole war. It was opened with promptitude, and the two most essential steps, the attacking of the laager and the sending of a force upstream to prevent an attempt at breaking out, were begun without a moment's delay. The tactical scheme was developed rapidly, and its errors of distribution repaired as far as possible. It was an imperfect scheme, no doubt, but so have been the schemes of many great victories which have been evolved in the stress and amid the uncertainty of the fray. The conception of a battle as a tactical set-piece, devised beforehand and carried out according to programme, is one of those dangerous fixed ideas begotten of Aldershot field days which tend to stifle the living spirit of warfare. Moreover, Paardeberg was at least conducted with energy and persistence, and practically the whole of the troops on the field were brought into action. Whatever mistakes Kitchener may have made, there can be no comparison between his impatient and unquenchable thirst for victory at Paardeberg and the paralytic stupor of Spion Kop or Vaal Krantz. Above all, he refused to accept a partial check as a defeat. That evening, when all was exhaustion and confusion, his only comment in reporting the situation to Roberts was that he hoped to be able to "do something more definite" on the morrow. That he was right in his expectation there can be no doubt. He had grappled with the Boers, barred their escape, and by persistent hammering driven them together into barely two miles of river bed. In spite of errors and miscarriages, he had won his victory. Its

* See pp. 299, 300. In this respect the Russo-Japanese War, which in some respects belongs to an earlier period of tactical development than the South African War, has furnished invaluable lessons.

consummation, indeed, was deferred to the morrow. But that consummation was now a certainty, though the price to be paid for it might still be fairly heavy.

Roberts during 18th; sends 14th Brigade and artillery.

All day during the 18th the Commander-in-Chief had been confined to his headquarters at Jacobsdal. But, though unable to move, he was not inactive. From Kitchener he received a very sanguine report sent just after the attack had begun, and several more, each somewhat less hopeful than its predecessor, in the course of the afternoon. In his replies he urged Kitchener to impress upon his colleagues the necessity of making a brilliant success of the opportunity given them, and later on, when less favourable news came in, insisted that on no account was Cronje to be allowed to escape or to hold on till reinforcements could reach him. At the same time he took the practical steps to reinforce Kitchener which he had deferred on the preceding evening. Tucker, with the 14th Brigade, Hall's brigade division of R.F.A., Bearcroft's four 4·7-inch and three 12-pounders of the reunited Naval Brigade, and the C.I.V.M.I., was ordered to start at 9 P.M. for Klip Drift, and be ready to push on with all speed to Paardeberg. Wavell, with the 15th Brigade, was provisionally to stay at Jacobsdal, but in his place Pole-Carew, with the Guards Brigade, was ordered to march during the night from the Modder to Klip Drift. Roberts informed Kitchener of these dispositions, and announced his intention of proceeding himself to Klip Drift at an early hour. But the seriousness of the situation, as shown in Kitchener's last telegram, and his own improving health, decided him to go straight to Paardeberg. Leaving Jacobsdal at 4 A.M. on the 19th, he reached the scene of the battle in six hours.

Feb. 19. Roberts's arrival. Misunderstanding about surrender.

No change had taken place in the situation in the interval. Cronje had made no attempt to break out. The only step he had taken, an application for a twenty-four hours' armistice to bury his dead and collect his wounded, clearly showed that his best hope now lay in postponing the attack. In twenty-four hours his men might recover from the effects of the battle and, at any rate, improve their defences; above all, twenty-four hours gained might mean everything to the forces hurrying up to his relief. Roberts

saw this, and at once sent a message to Cronje declining to grant his request and summoning him to surrender unconditionally. Cronje had no idea of surrendering and sent back a laconic refusal, which was, however, mistranslated as an acceptance.* Troops were actually marched down towards the river to take over their prisoners before a sharp fire showed there was a mistake. A further interchange of messages made the situation clear. Nothing remained for Roberts but to make his preparations for the attack, and he now rode out to reconnoitre the position.

Feb. 19-20. Roberts abandons attack on laager.

But already Roberts was beginning to feel serious misgivings about the advisability of attacking at all. The loss of life already incurred—unnecessarily squandered, as more than one informant was not slow to hint—appalled him, and he shrank from the idea of possibly doubling the tale of victims by a second attack. The troops who had fought on the 18th were still very exhausted; was it fair to ask them to undergo the strain again so soon? The 14th Brigade, which only arrived late in the afternoon, having marched almost without a rest from Jacobsdal, would hardly be much fitter for immediate action. Roberts decided at any rate to postpone the attack another day, and meanwhile to complete his own inspection of the position, and to carry out a reconnaissance in force, which might enable him to come to a final conclusion. In other words, he hesitated, and was lost. The reconnaissance, which was carried out next morning by the 13th Brigade on the south side of the laager, and by the 19th on the north, revealed nothing that was not known before and only tired the men to no purpose. The attack looked more unpleasant than ever. Might not the end be equally well attained without it? After all, Cronje could only hold out a few days at the most, for if bombardment did not render his position untenable, his supplies must soon run short. The feebleness of the efforts to relieve him hitherto suggested

* The message ran: "Since you are so unmerciful as not to accord the time asked for, nothing remains for me to do; you do as you wish." This was read as "nothing remains for me but to do as you wish," *i.e.*, to surrender. In his second message Cronje added, "During my lifetime I will never surrender. If you wish to bombard, fire away. *Dixi.*"

that any Boer forces coming from outside might be held off till his surrender. The hospital arrangements were limited; was it justifiable to run the risk of throwing another thousand wounded upon a staff already overtaxed with the casualties in hand? Supplies were short; a few days' delay might enable more to be brought up, and the advance to be resumed more safely and more effectively. There was no such clear, unmistakable issue here as that which Buller's telegram from Vaal Krantz had presented a fortnight earlier, no question of abandoning the whole object of his campaign for fear of being responsible for losses. But it is difficult to believe that, with a commander of Roberts's strategical genius, these arguments could by themselves have prevailed for a moment against the need for prompt action. What gave them force, what made them seem convincing, was the reluctance to face the losses involved in an attack. To this reluctance and to the general sentiment of those round him—excepting always Kitchener, who vainly endeavoured to stir up one of the brigadiers to volunteer for a night attack—Roberts now yielded, and, finally abandoning all idea of destroying Cronje by main force, resigned himself to waiting for his surrender.

Dangers involved in his decision.

That Roberts, in abandoning the attack, was only refraining from an impossible or, at least, highly dangerous enterprise, is a contention which cannot for a moment be sustained. The Boers were completely surrounded and their position located with absolute precision. That position—a brushwood-fringed ditch two miles long and in places 200 yards across—possessed no great natural or artificial strength whatever except cover and a good field of fire to north and south, an advantage which could easily be neutralised by a night attack. Once the British troops reached the bank on both sides the Boers in the ditch were absolutely at their mercy. The attack was a practical certainty. But what was no less a certainty was that it would involve losses, possibly heavy losses, and it was from these that the Commander-in-Chief shrank. In shrinking from them he faced risks whose gravity few appreciated, the more so as they came to nothing in the event, and sacrificed opportunities whose full significance was lost sight of amid the general satisfaction

at the successes actually secured. To judge those risks it is necessary to consider not only the actual position of the investing force at Paardeberg, in itself precarious enough, but the whole strategical situation. Rapidity, secrecy and unexpectedness were the whole essence of Roberts's plan. They constituted its safety and its certainty. Robbed of them its weakness stood apparent. Already before this the Boers had begun to discover the deception practised upon them in front of Colesberg, and had driven Clements back on Arundel. If they now pressed forward on Naauwpoort and De Aar, aided by the rebellion already springing up in the west, they might wreck the whole of Roberts's campaign even though they might not save Cronje. If, instead, they came across in force on to Roberts's flank and rear—and very few days were required for this—they might make his position impossible and force him to relinquish his prize, to fall back, and to prepare to begin his campaign over again. That they did neither of these things—that Cronje's danger caused them to hesitate in their advance on Naauwpoort, and that the reluctance to abandon what they had gained in Cape Colony caused them to delay effectively reinforcing Cronje till too late—does not affect the criticism. They had ample time to do either.

Material and moral advantages sacrificed.

Roberts's optimism was justified by the event, and, if the surrender of Cronje's force was the only object aimed at, he achieved his purpose, a week later, almost without bloodshed. To understand what he lost by the delay, and what the lives saved were yet to cost, it is necessary for a moment to anticipate the course of the narrative. The Paardeberg investment involved practically a fortnight's delay before the army was able to advance again.* That delay enabled the

* It must not be forgotten that the army at Paardeberg consumed supplies just as much as if it had been on the march, and that, therefore, the accumulation of fresh supplies for a new start was a matter of great difficulty, and necessitated short rations during the siege and further delay after Cronje's capture. By taking the laager at once, most of the Boer supplies would have been available for the advance, the prisoners being fed, on their way to Modder River, by the supplies coming up in rear. In one way or another there would have been enough supplies to enable the bulk of the force to push on for ten or twelve days on half rations. Nor was the delay, with its constant skirmishes against the relieving forces, in any sense a rest for men or horses.

Boers to extricate themselves from the perilous plight in which Roberts's strategy had placed them. To save Cronje or prevent Roberts getting to Bloemfontein was, indeed, beyond their power. But they had no difficulty in getting away untouched practically the whole of their forces south of the Orange River. The capture of the laager on the 20th would have meant an almost unopposed occupation of Bloemfontein by March 1st, and probably the annihilation or complete breaking up of the rest of the Free State forces. It would have saved the casualties of Poplar Grove and Driefontein, perhaps those of Sannah's Post and Reddersburg, and it would have saved much of the heaviest casualty list of all, that of the epidemic of enteric whose seeds were sown in the Paardeberg laager. It would have made possible an earlier advance to Pretoria, with less of danger and vexatious hindrance from the Free Staters on flank and rear. These are the calculable material results. The moral results are almost incalculable. As things were, the Boers lost 4,000 men, an appreciable part of their forces. But they were given a little while to prepare themselves for this loss, and to recover from it. When Cronje surrendered they were discouraged and demoralized, but they were not cowed or utterly terrified. They never again made any effective stand against Roberts's advance. But they fled from the fear of being surrounded and made prisoners, not from the terror of death. Paardeberg taught them to respect British generalship. It did not teach them to fear the British soldier. Only some direct act like the storming of the laager would have inspired that fear. Far less accustomed as they were to the idea of losing life than even the British, a thousand casualties would have produced an ineffaceable impression on them. And in the same degree that the storming of the laager would have broken the spirit of the Boers, it would have uplifted that of the British Army, and implanted in it a thirst for swift and decisive victory, a belief in its attainability, and an indifference to its cost, which would have saved England and Africa alike much of the long agony of a struggle indefinitely protracted by the futile wish to wage war without losing life. Paardeberg was not the first or the

most signal instance of its futility. But it was an unequalled occasion for giving a new example and for inspiring a new spirit. To that occasion Roberts failed to rise. Great soldier though he was, he was not great enough to break through the limitations of his environment, to run counter to the deep-rooted sentiment alike of the army at Paardeberg and of the nation at home. For fear of losing a few lives he refused to take the full and perfect reward of his own bold strategy and of the efforts of his subordinates, content with a less assured and less fruitful form of victory.

CHAPTER XV

THE BREAK IN THE MARCH

Importance and difficulty of task assigned to Clements.

To understand fully the delicate and, indeed, critical nature of the general situation during the opening stage of Lord Roberts's great flank march, and at the moment of his decision to stop the strategic momentum of that march for the sake of besieging Cronje at Paardeberg, we must turn our attention to certain events which, though taking place a hundred miles away, were yet intimately and vitally connected with every phase of his operations. In order to mass on his left flank the force required for those operations, Roberts had been compelled seriously to weaken his position south of the Orange River, more especially in front of Colesberg. By so doing he laid himself open to a counterstroke which might well prove quite as fatal to himself as his advance was intended to be to the Boers. It was essential to the success of his campaign that this weakness should not be discovered before his own attack was fairly launched; and, if discovered, that the counter-attack should not be allowed to reach any vital point—such as the main railway communications at Naauwpoort—before his own advance should have penetrated to the heart of the enemy's country and paralysed all their activities. It was a part of no small importance, therefore, that he assigned in his scheme to General Clements, French's successor at Rensburg. And the part was as difficult as it was important. When Clements took over the command on February 6 his whole force consisted of four and a half battalions of infantry, two batteries, two squadrons of cavalry, and some 600 Australians in process of being converted into Mounted Infantry. With these he had to attempt to maintain practically the whole front held by French with

a force twice as large, and infinitely more effective, because largely mounted; for to have contracted his front substantially would at once have betrayed his weakness and spoiled everything. As a matter of fact the front had been reduced a few days before from over 40 to about 35 miles by the abandonment of the posts at Potfontein and Kleintoren east of the Oorlog's Poort Spruit, but even so it was quite out of all proportion to the strength and character of the force at his disposal. At the same time he had to be prepared, if found out, to extricate his handful of infantrymen from their widely-scattered positions in the face of an enemy superior in numbers and mobility, and to fight a series of rearguard actions covering Naauwpoort, as long as the developments of Roberts's plan might require. It was a task requiring consummate nerve and judgment on the part of the general, and making a great demand on the steadiness and endurance of the troops.

Clements's dispositions.

Clements disposed his force as best he could. Like French, he divided it into two wings, separated by the railway. On the left were the immovable Berkshires on McCracken's Hill; four companies of the Wiltshires and the New South Wales M.I. at the Kloof; three Wiltshire companies, a squadron of Inniskillings, the South Australians and Victorians, with four guns of the 4th Battery, R.F.A., between Windmill Camp and Maeder's, with outposts at Hobkirk's Farm and Bastard's Nek; the remaining two guns with a company of Bedfords on Coleskop; lastly, two companies of Bedfords on Porter's Hill—the whole under Colonel Carter of the Wiltshires. On the right Colonel Hacket-Pain, of the Worcesters, commanded the Worcesters, Royal Irish, a squadron of Inniskillings, the West Australians, 2 howitzers 37th R.F.A., and 4 guns "J" R.H.A. at Slingersfontein, and the Tasmanians and a few of Rimington's Guides at Jasfontein. Clements himself, with four companies of Bedfords, a few unmounted Australians, a company R.E., and two guns "J" R.H.A., made his headquarters at Rensburg.

Increase of Boer strength.

If the British forces round Colesberg were reduced to a mere skeleton in the first days of February, those of the Boers, on the contrary, were being substantially increased,

Roberts's efforts to create the impression that he intended to force the passage of the Orange River at Norval's Pont had proved completely successful; almost too successful, in fact. For Steyn, in his alarm, had brought up the Bethlehem commando and other detachments from the Basutoland border, and had induced Kruger to send, not only some of the commandos who had hitherto been along the northern border of the Transvaal, but also some 750 Heidelbergers from Natal. There were now considerably over 7,000, perhaps even as many as 8,000 Boers concentrating against Clements. They had only to discover his weakness to retrieve the opportunity for striking at the heart of Cape Colony which they had missed in November. Fortunately, in spite of the unchecked movements of disloyal farmers, no inkling of the truth seems to have reached the Boers for more than a week after the withdrawal of French's troops began, a testimony partly to the impression created by French on his opponents* and to the skill with which Clements maintained the policy of bluff, but even more to the inherent advantages of the system of widely-extended positions, which defied comprehensive observation, and whose strength could only be discovered by actual attack. Even the withdrawal from Potfontein and Kleintoren, which was at once discovered, was only supposed to be caused by a concentration preliminary to the threatened advance. De la Rey, however, pushed forward Fighting-General Celliers to the evacuated positions, and prepared to work still further round to test the strength of the British right flank. The Boer dispositions seem at this period to have been, roughly, as follows: On the right wing, from Colesberg to Plessis Poort, and covering the road to the wagon bridge, was Grobler with 1,500–2,000 men. In the centre P. de Wet—recently elected Free State Head Commandant on the southern border in place of Grobler—and Schoeman, with 2,500–3,000 men, held the positions in front of Colesberg and for some five or six miles to the east. On the left De la Rey, with an equally strong force, exercised

* French's own departure, as distinguished from the weakening of his force, does not seem to have been discovered by the Boers for a very long time, certainly not till after February 15.

practically an independent command from his head laager in front of Achtertang. Under him were Generals Lemmer and Celliers, the latter on the extreme left wing, and Commandant Van Dam with the Johannesburg police. The guns—six field pieces, two howitzers, and five pom-poms—were distributed along the line.

Skirmishes. Feb. 6–9.

On February 6 a small British force which had gone out reconnoitring to Potfontein narrowly escaped being cut off by De la Rey and Celliers, who pressed after it to the Oorlog's Poort Spruit, taking a few prisoners, and threatened a further advance in rear of Slingersfontein. This necessitated the occupation by a company of Worcesters, under Major Stubbs, of a hill (Stubbs Hill) on the left bank of the Spruit. Next day Celliers attacked the hill. He was repulsed, but De la Rey had learnt what he wanted to know, namely, that the British force was considerably weakened. He communicated his information to Pretoria, and announced his intention of assuming a vigorous offensive. But before attacking he decided to feel his way a little further. On the 9th Celliers's men crossed the Oorlog's Poort Spruit in some force. A party of Tasmanians, under Captain Cameron, who had moved out from Jasfontein, were driven back with some loss from the hills near Vergelegen Farm, which the Boers now occupied. Their further advance was, however, stopped by the determination of a handful of West Australians, who, effectively supported by 4 guns of "J" Battery, held on till evening on a detached kopje, known, in consequence, as Australian Hill.

De la Rey's plan of attack for Feb. 10. Its postponement.

De la Rey had [illegible] located the British right wing to his own satisfaction, and at once made his arrangements for a combined attack on the morrow. His plan was simple and effective. Its immediate objective was the group of high hills, known as the Worcester Hills, three miles from Slingersfontein, which now formed the extreme north-eastern angle of the British position. Their capture would, he reckoned, at once render Slingersfontein Camp and the adjoining positions untenable. To make sure of success he arranged with Schoeman to concentrate for the attack not only the main body of his own force, but also the greater part of the Boer

centre. At the same time, in order to reap the full reward of that success, he instructed Celliers to continue pushing round in rear of Slingersfontein, so as to be in position to cut off, or at least harry, the British retreat. Grobler also was simultaneously to conduct a vigorous attack on the British left. When the appointed hour for the attack arrived (2 A.M.), Schoeman failed to put in an appearance. The attack thus fell through. De la Rey's indignation at his colleague's incompetence was great, and was freely expressed when Schoeman cheerfully arrived in the course of the morning. Eventually it was decided to postpone the attack, and, as the 11th was a Sunday, not to begin till the 12th. Celliers, meanwhile, remained in his positions, and, bringing up a gun, dropped some long-range shells into Slingersfontein Camp. The only active operations on the 10th were on the Boer right, where Grobler's men drove in the outposts at Bastard's Nek and Hobkirk's Farm, and proceeded to occupy the low hill, known as Pink Hill, to the south of the farm. From this latter position, however, they fell back on the arrival of Colonel Carter with reinforcements. On this side, too, the Boers had decided to postpone their efforts. Though Clements knew nothing of what he had just escaped, it was obvious that a general attack was impending, and, indeed, information to that effect had reached him through two Boer deserters as early as the 8th. If that attack were really pressed his position might at any moment become impossible, and so serious did the situation seem to him, that he issued orders for a general retirement on the 11th. The orders were cancelled that evening, but on the understanding that they might be put into force at any moment.

Feb. 12. Attack on the Worcester Hills.

The Worcester Hills, which De la Rey had selected as the objective of his main attack, were a group of rough, broken kopjes, falling into three main sections. The eastern-most, known as No. 1 section, was a brushwood-covered ridge or plateau, some 1,400 yards long from north to south, by 400 yards wide, standing some 300 feet above the valley of the Oorlog's Poort Spruit, and rising another 100 feet or more into three sharply-defined peaks. Of these, Signal Hill

and Pinnacle Hill formed the northern and southern ends of the plateau, while, in the middle, Burnt Hill jutted out some distance to the east. A somewhat lower ridge, running south-westwards for a mile from the rear of Signal Hill, formed the central or No. 2 section. Beyond this again extended No. 3 section, a similar, but shorter, ridge. Each section was held by a company of the Worcesters. On this particular night, February 11–12, the whole position was under Captain Hovell, whose company occupied the central section; Brevet-Major Stubbs, with E Company, 95 men strong, held No. 1 section. Of the other companies of the regiment, two were guarding the right rear on the Platberg and Stubbs Hill, while two were in camp. The Royal Irish held New Zealand Hill and other positions to the west of it. At dusk De la Rey's men marched out from their laager, four miles north of the Worcester Hills, and moved round to the east of the hills in readiness for the attack. For the actual assault De la Rey had picked out some 250 of Van Dam's "Zarps," and 60 or 70 Bethlehem burghers, under Commandant Pietersen. These were divided into three companies. Van Dam, with 100 police, was to take Burnt Hill, Lieutenant Coetzee, with another 100, Signal Hill, while Pinnacle Hill was left to Pietersen, helped by the rest of the "Zarps." At 1 A.M. Van Dam moved his men down to the bed of the Spruit, and there waited for the moon to sink. At 3 A.M. the Boers started on the difficult climb to the summit. Half an hour later they were startled by the sentry's challenge. The whole hillside at once blazed with fire, but the "Zarps" pushed boldly on, and, in spite of the gallant resistance of the advanced posts, successfully reached the crest of both Burnt Hill and Signal Hill. An attempt was made by Lieutenant Bartholomew, with a handful of men, to retake Burnt Hill, but failed. By dawn Stubbs's men, fighting with admirable steadiness, were driven back to the rear edge of the plateau, and to Pinnacle Hill, while the regimental Maxim, which was north of Signal Hill, was taken after a stiff fight. At the same time a small party of Boers seems to have made an attempt to climb the central section, but to have lost heart while ascending. At dawn Hovell, hearing of the capture of

Burnt Hill, sent half a company from No. 3 section to reinforce Stubbs. More men it was difficult for him to spare, as the Boers were now bringing into action their whole force, including Schoeman's reinforcements and several guns, and were threatening all the British positions from Madocks Hill eastwards. But most of his own men were subsequently faced eastwards, and co-operated most effectively by keeping up a heavy fire against Burnt Hill and Signal Hill.

Boer attack beaten off.

As on Wagon Hill, the Boers had succeeded in rushing the crest by weight of numbers. But, here again, the crest marked the limit of their success. It was not lack of courage that prevented the "Zarps" pushing forward and dislodging the handful of Worcesters in front of them. But the Worcesters were a regiment who for years had devoted special care to their musketry, and the deadly accuracy of their fire, both from Pinnacle Hill and from the central section, made them more than a match for their opponents. From the moment day broke they asserted their superiority, and small parties even attempted, more than once, assisted in the course of the morning by a howitzer and by four guns of "J" Battery, under Major Enthoven, to recover the ground they had lost. In this they were unsuccessful, and Stubbs himself fell in a most gallant attempt to recapture Burnt Hill. Lieut.-Colonel Coningham, too, who came up to Pinnacle Hill in the morning to take over the command, was killed immediately on arrival. In the afternoon the howitzer shells set fire to the brushwood on the hill, and at 6 P.M. the Boers abandoned the crest and fell back discomfited. Their losses were officially given as under 30, but there are grounds for believing that they were two or three times as heavy. The Worcesters lost 3 officers and 22 men killed, or died of wounds, and 2 officers and 47 men wounded, the losses in Major Stubbs's company amounting to over 40 per cent. of its strength. It had been impossible for Clements to reinforce the Worcester Hills to any extent during the day, as Madocks Hill, whose capture would have been even more serious than that of the Worcester Hills, was threatened by Schoeman during the morning, while the southern positions actually required reinforcing owing to

an attempt of Celliers to get possession of Stubbs Hill. Some of Commandant Olivier's men, at the same time, pushed still further round on to the hills north-east of Jasfontein, thus threatening to cut off Slingersfontein Camp from the rear. The full scope of De la Rey's plan, and the extent of the disaster that would have resulted from the failure of the Worcesters to hold their own, can be clearly recognized from these movements.

Boer attack on left wing. Gallantry of Australians.

Meanwhile, on their right, the Boers had opened at daybreak with a howitzer from Bastard's Nek, which, after a while, was silenced by two of Butcher's guns. Towards noon Grobler directed part of his force to demonstrate against Windmill Camp, while he himself, with the Waterbergers and Zoutpansbergers, supported by a field gun and several pom-poms, led a determined enveloping attack across the open against Pink Hill. This position was now held by a company of Wiltshires and some 80–100 Victorians and South Australians, under Major Eddy, V.M.R., some 200 men in all. So rapid was the Boer advance that it threatened, not only to annihilate the detachment on Pink Hill, but also to rush Windmill Camp and endanger the Coles Kop and Kloof positions. But the force on Pink Hill made so determined a stand, that it was not till 3 P.M. that the Boers secured the hill, too late in the day, and too exhausted themselves to follow up their success. The main credit for the defence of Pink Hill belongs to the Australians, who, inspired by the splendid gallantry of their commander, hung on to the very last, most heroically covering the withdrawal of the infantry from Pink Hill and Windmill Camp. Their losses amounted to nearly 40 per cent. of their strength. Of their five officers, Eddy and two others were killed, the remaining two severely wounded. As an exhibition of resolute courage on the part of comparatively untrained troops, this performance of the Australians is well worthy of mention.

Feb. 12–14. Clements withdraws to Rensburg and Arundel.

Taken as a whole, the Boer attack had entirely failed of its object, thanks to the skill and bravery of the small detachments, on whom the brunt of the day had fallen. And it is possible, though anything but certain, that if the British had

remained in their positions, and shown an equally resolute front on the 13th as on the 12th, the Boers might have hesitated, for some days at least, before attacking again. Clements was at first inclined to think so, at any rate as regards the left wing, and in the afternoon ordered Carter to hold on to the line from Coles Kop to Maeder's. It would have been a difficult and dangerous task, and Carter, after the experiences of the morning, thought it impossible. Accordingly Clements sanctioned a withdrawal of the whole left wing to Rensburg. The withdrawal began at 8.30 P.M., and was carried out without difficulty, the guns having already been taken down from Coles Kop before dark. Orders were at the same time sent to Hacket-Pain to withdraw the right wing, which was, indeed, in a far more difficult position. Collecting his men at Slingersfontein after dark, Hacket-Pain marched off at midnight and brought his column in at an early hour on the 13th. The weary troops were at once posted in new positions round Rensburg. But Clements had already determined to continue his retirement to Arundel, where the tactical features of the ground offered far better facilities for defence by his little force, and where there was a better water supply.* Accordingly the Worcesters were sent down to Arundel to take up positions, while during the rest of the day the stores at Rensburg were being loaded on to the trains and got away. The troops themselves were to march at 5.30 A.M. on the 14th. Late that evening, however, Clements decided that it would be safer to get away soon after midnight, to avoid the possibility of the retreating columns being shelled from Taaiboschlaagte. Once again the troops were drawn in from their positions, and at 1.30 A.M. marched off and reached Arundel at dawn.

Feb. 14. Loss of two companies of Wiltshires.

By some mistake the alteration in the hour of march was either never communicated to, or not understood by, two companies of the Wiltshires, who had come in after dusk from Vaal Kop, and had bivouacked north of Rensburg Station. Marching down to Rensburg just before dawn to join their battalion, they found the force departed, and at once started

* See p. 128. Throughout the operations the troops immediately round Rensburg had to have all their drinking water brought up by rail.

marching after them. It was already too late. A party of Germans and Johannesburgers, intent on loot, had before this reached the deserted camp, and, discovering them, at once opened fire. In the first confusion, the Wiltshires rushed across the line towards some low kopjes south-east of the station. Unfortunately the Boers were there already, and received them with a hot fire. Other parties now galloped round their flanks and tried to head them off. Their position was hopeless, but coolly and skilfully handled by Major Macmullen, who had succeeded in rallying them after the first confusion, they fought their way for about three miles, till Macmullen fell, mortally wounded. After this they gradually lost cohesion, and broke into small groups, which were successively forced to surrender. Fifty-seven killed and wounded and 103 prisoners were the casualties of this unlucky affair. Mounted troops and guns had been sent up from Arundel as soon as the absence of the two companies was discovered, but they arrived too late to help the Wiltshires. They, however, covered the retreat of half a company of Bedfords, who had been similarly forgotten. These had discovered the departure of the force much earlier, and would have had no difficulty in getting away unassisted, but for the fact that their officer, Captain Lightfoot, hearing the firing behind him, and guessing its cause, had promptly marched his men back along the railway, and made a most praiseworthy attempt to extricate the remnants of the Wiltshires.

Appreciation of the operations.

Apart from this one unfortunate incident, whose causes were purely regimental and due, no doubt, to the extreme exhaustion of Carter and other officers after the incessant work of the last few days, the operations described in the last few pages must be reckoned among the best conducted in the whole war. Considering all the circumstances, the maintenance of French's positions till the 12th, and the subsequent successful withdrawal of the force, reflect the very greatest credit on the courage and judgment of General Clements and on the conduct of his troops, from the commanders of the two wings down to the men who bore the incessant strain of outpost work, marching, and fighting. The most significant feature of these operations, perhaps, is

the important part played by the two small detachments which happened to be at the points on which the Boer attack was first delivered. But for the steadiness and gallantry of the Worcesters and Australians February 12 might easily have involved a really serious disaster to Clements's force, many of whose units, scattered over thirty miles of front, would then, in all probability, have shared the fate which befel the two Wiltshire companies. How such a disaster would have crippled Roberts's operations the reader can well imagine. If there is one lesson of general application that stands out clearer than any other from the part played by the two detachments mentioned, it is the intimate and vital connection between strategy and tactical efficiency. The strength of a chain is the strength of its weakest link, and, in the long run, the greatest general's plans depend upon the trained skill and patriotic resolution of the common soldier, upon the unflagging zeal in peace, and resourceful boldness in war, of the company officer.

Steyn stops Boer advance.

On the 14th Clements took up a series of positions round Arundel covering a front of over twenty miles, and awaited an immediate attack, determined to hold on as long as possible, and, if necessary, to fall back on Naauwpoort, to which place Militia battalions, Cape Volunteers, and artillery were being hurried up by Roberts's orders. For the Boers, indeed, a prompt advance was plainly indicated, and, it would seem, was actually in contemplation. Steyn himself had proposed to visit the Colesberg laagers on the 14th to infuse energy into the new invasion of Cape Colony. But, anxious as P. de Wet and De la Rey were for a renewal of the attack on the morning of the 14th, the burghers were not to be hurried. For the moment they were busy moving forward their laagers, and till they were settled Clements could wait. Before many hours had passed the whole idea of a further advance beyond Rensburg was suddenly subjected to doubt. Roberts's invasion had exercised upon the Free State government precisely the effect he had calculated upon. Uncertain of the situation, anxious for the safety of Bloemfontein, Steyn suddenly became alarmed at the idea of the commandos in Cape Colony becoming too seriously committed, or pushing

on beyond the reach of easy recall. Following a very natural but fatal inclination, he decided to temporize, and sent the following message to De Wet:—

"As long as you can hold your present positions with the men you have, do so; if not, come here as quickly as circumstances will allow, as matters here are taking a serious turn."

Action on Feb. 20. Boer forces begin to be withdrawn.

For the moment everything was in suspense. Two or three days later, whether the menace to Bloemfontein itself seemed less immediate, or whether the generals at Colesberg protested against the loss of an unequalled opportunity, Steyn seems to have given a half-hearted sanction to the idea of an advance. Preparations were made for working round both of Clements's flanks, with the idea, it would seem, of following up a successful attack by an immediate advance on Naauwpoort and Hanover Road. Skirmishes were frequent. But it was not till the 20th that anything like a general attack was made. Clements had meanwhile been reinforced by two 5-inch guns, two companies Regular M.I., and some Cape Volunteers, and held his own without difficulty. Whatever had been the original intentions of this attack, which had evidently been planned on a large scale, there can be little doubt that, before it was delivered, the heart was taken out of it by the news which the Boer leaders now received from Bloemfontein. It was a last irresolute attempt to test Clements's strength before definitely abandoning the initiative, from which so much had been expected, under the pressure of the imperious call for relief from the laager at Paardeberg. That same day Celliers, with his force, was hurried back to Bloemfontein, and was followed during the next two days by De Wet with about 2,000 men. In his place De la Rey was appointed to the supreme command of all the republican forces south of the Orange River, with orders to maintain himself, as long as possible, on the defensive.

Boer indecision.

From all the actions and decisions of the Boers during these critical days, one thing stands out clearly—the psychological soundness of Roberts's plan of campaign. At every point of the theatre of war the paralysing influence of his

advance made itself felt, and yet at no point could the Boers bring themselves whole-heartedly to resign the objects for which they had struggled so long, and concentrate their energies in order to avert the impending disaster. Steyn's intervention on the 14th had lost the really promising opportunity which then offered itself for an effective counter-stroke against Clements. A second, and undeserved, opportunity was now furnished by Roberts's halt at Paardeberg. Even on the 20th a bold advance into Cape Colony might seriously have imperilled Roberts's plans. But such a course no longer presented the advantages it did a few days earlier. It would no longer have availed to rescue Cronje or to preserve Bloemfontein from occupation. The whole situation plainly demanded another course, namely, the immediate concentration of every available burgher to extricate Cronje and, if possible, to force Roberts to fall back. The halt had at once lifted the paralysing veil of mystery from Roberts's movements. The whereabouts of his force, his line of supplies, the tactical difficulties of his position, were all plainly revealed. With 6,000–7,000 men brought to bear against the investing ring the chances of success were by no means desperate; with 10,000 almost certain. Even the larger of these forces could rapidly be concentrated by abandoning Colesberg and Stormberg—leaving a mere rearguard to hold back Clements and Gatacre and dispute the crossing of the Orange River—and by bringing round the greater part of the commandos holding the line of the Vaal from Fourteen Streams to Barkly West against a possible advance from Kimberley. The task would be still easier if Ladysmith and the line of the Tugela were abandoned and a few thousand burghers brought round from Natal. But to do so meant resigning all hope of the prize for which the burghers had shed their blood on the Platrand and at Spion Kop; elsewhere concentration meant abandoning the territories so confidently annexed, and forsaking the allies who had so eagerly welcomed them, and thrown in their lot with the republics. It meant a heavier sacrifice than, at that moment, either presidents or burghers could bring themselves to face. A week later that sacrifice was a mere incident in the general

disaster, which, made in time, it might, perhaps, have averted.

Efforts to collect a force for Cronje's relief. Signs of demoralization.

Short of that sacrifice, indeed, every effort was made to collect a force for Cronje's relief. On the 16th, before any detachments were withdrawn from Colesberg, General A. P. Cronje, with a considerable part of the Free State commandos on the Upper Tugela, had been ordered up from Natal, and was followed, during the next week, by other detachments, the total force transferred amounting to over 2,000 men. Kolbe had arrived at Boshof on the 18th,* and moved forward next day to Ferreira's laager, about half way between Boshof and Koedoesrand, where he was in touch with the force assembling at Poplar Grove, nine miles east of Koedoesrand Drift. Small detachments were also sent by Du Toit from Fourteen Streams. It was from that side, indeed, that reinforcements could have been spared most easily, and every effort was made to induce the commandants to send their men. But no part of the Boer forces seems to have been more completely demoralized than the commandos which had been engaged in the investment of Kimberley. The Lichtenburgers had not stopped in their flight from French till they reached Christiana, whence Vermaas sent a despairing appeal to Kruger to stop the war at once in order to save at least the lives and goods of the burghers, since further resistance was hopeless. The main body at Fourteen Streams remained entirely inactive, and, on inquiries from Pretoria, Commandant Visser † reported that they were "waiting for instructions." A few sentences from Joubert's reproof of their faint-heartedness throw a striking light on the situation, and on the difficulties with which a Boer commander-in-chief had to contend:—

"I have seen your telegram in which it is stated that you are there with 250 of your men and 1,000 Free Staters, having decided to wait for further instructions. How is that possible? Are there not instructions enough from the banks of the Modder River, whence for so many days already General Cronje has been

* See p. 410.

† Du Toit with a small force had pushed forward again to Windsorton to keep touch with Breytenbach at Barkly West, and to prevent Methuen crossing.

calling in his agony 'Come, relieve me'? What other instructions can now be given or demanded than, with one voice and with one mouth, 'burghers of South Africa, go and help deliver your General from the might of the tyrant'? . . . Relieve Cronje cost what it will. If such a resolution is taken by you and your officers, and you trust in God, you shall certainly win. But wavering and doubt, unbelief and mistrust, will not only bring bitter sorrow on our South Africa and the whole African people, but destroy our whole national existence. Therefore trust firmly in God and He shall give you strength. Relieve Cronje."

Situation at Paardeberg Feb. 19. Ferreira's death. De Wet on Kitchener's Kopje.

It is to those attempts to relieve Cronje and to the course of his investment that we must now turn our attention. The condition of Cronje's own force after the battle of the 18th has already been described. The Boers outside had been less seriously engaged and were, in spite of their small numbers, in a better position to attempt some bold stroke for Cronje's relief on the 19th than he was to break out. But many of them had ridden away; the rest were scattered over a considerable extent of ground, unorganized, and for the moment without a leader. During the night Head Commandant Ferreira had met his death by an unfortunate accident,* and it was not till the 20th that a telegram from Steyn appointed C. de Wet to act in Ferreira's place, pending a proper election. De Wet himself had spent the night in dragging a Krupp and a pom-pom on to Kitchener's Kopje and preparing emplacements for them, and opened fire on the British at an early hour. It was under cover of this fire that Commandants Froneman and Potgieter, with about 100 resolute men, managed to gallop across from the laager and make their escape. A more active part De Wet did not consider himself strong enough to take, more especially as his attention was fully occupied most of the day in warding off British attempts to turn him out of his commanding position. At an early hour Broadwood's brigade had, at Kitchener's request, crossed the river at Paardeberg Drift,

* Going along his outposts after dark he had prodded a sleeping sentry with the butt of his rifle. Thus suddenly startled the man had clutched at the trigger and shot him. Accidents of this kind, due to carelessness in handling firearms, seem to have been very common in the Boer laagers.

and in conjunction with the 2nd and 8th M.I. tried to work round Kitchener's Kopje from the south. But though the Boers were, after some skirmishing, driven off a small kopje some 2½ miles south-west of Kitchener's Kopje, and the position occupied by the 8th M.I., Broadwood thought Kitchener's Kopje itself too strongly held to attack, and fell back, with very exhausted horses, to Paardeberg Drift.

Gloucesters capture part of Kitchener's Kopje, but are recalled by Roberts.

Meanwhile the Gloucesters, who during the night had intrenched themselves where they left off fighting on the previous evening, had kept up a long-range fire fight with De Wet's men all day. Late in the afternoon, by Roberts's orders, they advanced to the attack, supported by the 76th Battery and the Oxfordshire L.I. Just before dark Colonel Lindsell led a gallant charge up the slope and, though wounded himself, succeeded in clearing the Boers from one end of the hill, where his men promptly intrenched themselves, prepared to complete the capture of the hill in the morning. But during the night Roberts, believing that the position could be taken with less loss of life by a turning movement with the cavalry, ordered them to withdraw, to their own surprise and to De Wet's great relief. In this instance, as in so many others, it is impossible not to recognize the baneful influence of the prevailing fear of casualties. The immediate capture of Kitchener's Kopje was essential to prevent the possibility of Cronje's breaking out on that side. On the night of the 18th the exhaustion of his men told against any such attempt. But on the next two nights there was nothing that would have rendered the attempt impossible, and it was only Cronje's obstinate determination not to move, and the inertia of his men, that kept them in the bed of the river. And apart from the question of time there were other cogent reasons against using cavalry for a task which the infantry could quite well have performed. At that moment the cavalry horses were the most precious part of Roberts's army. They had been heavily overworked already. Owing to transport difficulties, more especially the loss of the convoy at Waterval, they were hopelessly starved, and, unlike Boer ponies, were unaccustomed to eke out their forage by persistent nibbling at the scanty

grass of the veld.* Yet fresh work, fully as hard as any they had done, was in contemplation for them. When Roberts finally decided not to attack the laager, but to wait for Cronje's surrender, it was proposed, as an alternative, that the cavalry should make a dash ahead for Bloemfontein, or the railway to the south of it, and thus prevent a Boer concentration against the investing force at Paardeberg. Under these circumstances the lives of infantrymen ought not to have weighed for a moment with a general as compared with the condition of his horses.

Movements of Feb. 20. Nature of the bombardment.

The proposed cavalry operation against Kitchener's Kopje did not, however, take place on the 20th, but was deferred to the following day, mainly in order to await the arrival of Porter's brigade, which had been telegraphed for on the 19th. But, preparatory to the morrow's attack, French moved his headquarters down to Koedoesrand Drift, while Gordon's brigade occupied Makow's Drift, two miles upstream, and cleared out small parties of Boers from the kopjes south of the river between the two drifts. The infantry reconnaissance carried out that morning has already been referred to in the previous chapter. The artillery, which had been bombarding the laager from the rise on the south side, was now redistributed. The 76th, 81st, 82nd, and 65th Batteries, with three of the 4·7-inch naval guns which had come up that morning, and one 12-pounder, were taken over the river and posted on Gun Hill, whence an enfilading fire could be brought to bear on the river bed. The 18th, 62nd, and 75th Batteries, with the remaining 4·7 and three 12-pounders, remained on the rise. These positions were retained for the rest of the investment. The laager and river bed were shelled fairly heavily that afternoon, and in a desultory fashion off and on during the investment. But there never was any real bombardment, in the sense of an attempt to reduce the Boers by artillery fire. Such a bombardment would have required an expenditure of ammunition

* The horses had practically no corn at all on 18th and 19th. On the 20th they mostly got 8 lbs., instead of the full ration of 12 lbs., but between that date and the 26th, when it was again raised to 8 lbs. on the arrival of a convoy of supplies, it was much less, on some days as low as 3 lbs.

that Roberts was quite unable to afford. All that the artillery did during these days was to make the Boers uncomfortable, to prevent them moving about or massing for any sortie, to deny them the use of the laager in the day-time, to destroy their wagons, and to search out their shelters for stores or refuges for their animals. All these things it did very effectively, greatly helped in its labours after the 22nd by the observations of the ballooning officer, Lieutenant Grubb, R.E., who made his ascents from a point in the river bed within rifle range of the laager, and from a height of 1,000 feet or more sketched the Boer positions and signalled the results of the firing.

Feb. 21. French takes Kitchener's Kopje. De Wet's first escape.

Early on the 21st French started out. His idea was to get behind De Wet on the south and drive him off Kitchener's Kopje into the arms of the infantry, who had been warned to receive him. While Broadwood, with the Carabiniers, 10th Hussars, 12th Lancers, 4th and 8th M.I. and "G" Battery, moved round to the south-west of the hill, French himself, with the Household Cavalry, a squadron each of the 9th and 16th Lancers and "P" and "R" Batteries, moved round to the south-east to join hands with him. Gordon, with some mounted infantry, a squadron 16th Lancers and "O" Battery, held the kopjes south of Koedoesrand and Makow's Drifts, while a squadron 9th Lancers was posted at a farm-house further south. French's original intention was to move straight to the rear of De Wet up the valley between the kopjes immediately north-east of Stinkfontein and the kopje above Bankfontein Farm to the east of it. But the Boers held the western ends of these kopjes, and opened so vigorous a fire that French went round east of Bankfontein instead. De Wet had sent his guns down from the hill to check the British movement. Finding the British too strong, and being themselves short of ammunition, the Boer gunners and their escort galloped away towards Petrusburg to avoid the risk of being surrounded. French and his force went after them, but their horses were in too poor condition to do anything, and a halt was called some five miles south of Kitchener's Kopje. Broadwood, meanwhile, had approached much closer to the kopje from the south-west, and began

shelling it. At the first few shells the Boers on the kopje began to come down in large numbers. At the same moment some 200 Boers, under Andries Cronje, who had retired before Broadwood to a point about two miles east of Kitchener's Kopje, became alarmed and galloped south, almost straight into French. Thinking themselves surrounded they at first made an attempt to break through, dismounting when 1,000 yards off and firing heavily. But the guns came into action at once, and in a few minutes they broke up and fled in every direction. Those few minutes, however, had proved invaluable to De Wet and the main body on Kitchener's Kopje, who, seizing the occasion, had come off the hill and galloped in a confused mob down the valley which French had failed to get through just before. As they disappeared down the valley French shelled them from behind. As they passed the farm-house occupied by the 9th Lancers a section charged their rear and killed and wounded a few. Then the troops and guns on the ridges south of Koedoesrand and Makow's Drifts joined in successively, as they came within range. For six or seven miles the Boers were hunted from pillar to post, but finally got away almost unscathed towards Poplar Grove. Thus ended the first of De Wet's escapes from a tight corner, an escape due, no doubt, to his own bold promptitude, but quite as much to the mistakes of his adversary. For had French, when he moved south, only thought of posting a "stop" across the valley, De Wet would almost certainly have been caught, and the British troops saved many a weary chase in the next two years. As it was the only prisoners taken were some 50 men without horses, who remained on Kitchener's Kopje and surrendered to the infantry as they came up the hill from the north. These same infantry, the Lincolns, had meanwhile been having a curious experience on their side of the hill. Sent on the previous evening, with the Scottish Borderers and some transport, to relieve Stephenson's men at Vanderberg's Drift, they had lost their direction in the dark and had bivouacked close to the Boer laager. At day-break a heavy fire was opened on them. Falling back in some confusion before it they were fired at by other British troops, who thought they were the Boers escaping, and as

they approached Kitchener's Kopje they came under a fresh fire from De Wet's men, which, however, soon ceased in consequence of the events described just above.

Redistribution of troops for the investment.

The capture of Kitchener's Kopje enabled the distribution of the force for the investment to be placed on a more satisfactory footing, and measures were at once taken to carry this into effect. The troops were now disposed in two circles, an inner one investing the laager at from 1,200 to 2,500 yards' range, and an outer circle running on the south from Paardeberg Drift to Makow's Drift round by Kitchener's Kopje, and on the north by the Koedoesrand and Kameelfontein back to the Paardeberg. The inner line and the western and southern portions of the outer line were held by infantry, the northern and eastern portions of the latter by mounted troops. The positions of units remained, roughly speaking, what they had been on the 18th, except that Stephenson's brigade was now withdrawn to form the southern portion of the outer line, and its place east of the laager taken by three battalions of Chermside's, reinforced on the 24th by the West Ridings. Roberts's headquarters throughout the investment were on the left bank about a mile and a half above Paardeberg Drift.

Correspondence between Roberts and Cronje.

The only other military event of the 21st was the arrival, in the evening, of Porter's and Alderson's brigades. By some mistake Porter's orders had never reached him, and it was not till Methuen arrived to take over the command at Kimberley on the 20th that he heard that he was to go to Paardeberg. Certain correspondence, however, passed in the morning between Roberts and Cronje, which is of interest for the light it throws on the character of the two commanders. Hearing, for the first time, that there were women and children in the laager, Roberts chivalrously offered to give them a safe conduct, and at the same time offered to send to the Boers doctors and medicines, of both of which he learnt they were in need. Cronje declined the safe conduct, and would only accept medical help on condition that the doctors stayed in his laager "until such time as he should shift it." This being refused, he suggested the creation of a hospital camp 1,000 yards west of his laager. This, too, Roberts was

unable to accept. Two days later, however, an arrangement was made by which the British wounded prisoners in the laager were released and an equal number of Boer wounded taken over and sent to the German hospital at Jacobsdal, to be released when cured.

Feb. 22. Kitchener sent to Naauwpoort. Proposed cavalry raid abandoned.

On the following morning Roberts sent Kitchener back to the railway with orders to proceed to Naauwpoort and hurry on the arrangements for repairing the railway and the bridges over the Orange River as soon as the Boers fell back. In view of the insufficiency of his supplies and his expectation of shortly resuming the march on Bloemfontein, Roberts naturally laid the very greatest stress on the energy with which this task was accomplished. His decision to send Kitchener was, therefore, a perfectly natural one, admitting his conception of the functions of a Chief of the Staff. At the same time it is not impossible that the difference of view between them with regard to the immediate policy to be pursued at Paardeberg may have made the Commander-in Chief less disinclined than he might otherwise have been to let Kitchener go from his side for a few days. Before Kitchener left the arrangements for the cavalry raid to Bloemfontein were further discussed, and it was settled that the force should start on the 23rd. Subsequently the start was postponed, but on the 23rd Broadwood's brigade was brought round to Koedoesrand Drift, and all arrangements were made for the cavalry to start at a moment's notice with three days' supplies. But Roberts was beginning to have doubts about the whole idea, and finally let it drop altogether. Considering the weakness of the horses and the steadily-growing numbers of the Boers between Paardeberg and Bloemfontein, this decision was, perhaps, by now a wise one. If it had been carried out when first suggested the raid might undoubtedly have been very effective. Nevertheless, at any time it would have been riskier and less effective than the only sound policy—the immediate storming of the laager followed by the swift advance of the whole army.

Feb. 23. Unsuccessful attempt to recapture

The capture of Kitchener's Kopje on the 21st had not been an hour too soon. For scarcely had De Wet got clear away after his exciting gallop when he met General A. P.

Kitchener's Kopje.

Cronje with the first of the Natal reinforcements. These were the Winburgers under Commandant Theunissen and the Senekalers under Commandant Vilonel. Further detachments from Natal and from Colesberg came up on the 22nd, bringing the total relieving force laagered near Poplar Grove up to 3,500–4,000 men. A plan was now concerted for the recapture of Kitchener's Kopje, and of all the positions between it and Koedoesrand Drift. Early on the 23rd the general attack was made, Philip Botha and Theunissen attacking Kitchener's Kopje and Stinkfontein, Froneman the ridges immediately north-east of Stinkfontein, and De Wet and A. P. Cronje the kopje at Bankfontein. But the Boers had already lost heart completely. Nothing like their whole force was engaged, and De Wet's and Froneman's attacks ended in feeble demonstrations which the cavalry and Scottish Borderers had no difficulty in keeping at arm's length. The attack against Kitchener's Kopje was pressed with somewhat more determination, and several hundred Boers successfully ensconced themselves in the bushy underfeatures of the hill and kept up a vigorous fire fight for some hours with the Yorkshires on the hill itself. But when the Buffs on the east and Borderers on the west began to move forward round the Boer flanks Botha and most of his men took to flight. Theunissen and nearly 100 men, whose horses had been shot by the Buffs, clung on to their position for some time, but eventually surrendered. This unsuccessful attack cost the Boers, besides prisoners, some 30–40 casualties, including two field-cornets killed. The British casualties amounted to forty.

De Wet urges Cronje to break out. Theron's exploit.

With this failure the Boers at Poplar Grove abandoned all hope of effecting Cronje's relief. Their numbers were increasing every day, and the recapture either of Kitchener's Kopje or, what would have been even more effective, of the Koedoesrand, was by no means impossible for them. But they were completely discouraged, and beyond hovering about in small parties, and tiring the cavalry by frequent alarms at different points of the investing circle, made no attempt to interfere with the British. Cronje's only chance, in their opinion, now lay in his breaking out himself. De Wet had

been in intermittent heliographic communication with him since the 20th, and had endeavoured to keep up the courage of the besieged force by announcing the speedy arrival of large reinforcements. The 23rd and 24th, however, were cloudy, and De Wet found himself cut off from communication with Cronje at the very moment when it was most essential to induce Cronje to make an effort and to ensure combined action. At this juncture, Danie Theron, of Theron's Scouts, volunteered to make his way into the laager, explain the situation to Cronje, impress upon him the necessity for an immediate sortie, and arrange a definite plan which should enable De Wet to assist his escape by a simultaneous attack on the British lines. On the night of the 24th–25th, helped by the pouring rain, the gallant Theron crawled through the British posts, swam the flooded river, and reached the laager.* A *Krygsraad* was called together in the morning. Theron explained De Wet's scheme, and it was decided to break out that night. But there was little real enthusiasm for the plan. Many of the commandants were against it, and the burghers of some commandos openly declared they would take no part in it. During the 25th, as a result of the heavy rains of the last three days, the river rose seven or eight feet, making communication between the two banks very difficult, and on this pretext the sortie was postponed for another night, while a bridge was being constructed.

Boers in laager decide to surrender on 27th.

The rising of the river was, in one respect, a great relief to the Boers, for it carried away more than a thousand rotting carcases of horses and oxen which had been collected for security under the bank, and had been killed by the British shells. But even after their departure the stench from decaying animals and men, and from the general insanitary conditions of the laager, remained intolerable. The flooding out of the lower and securer shelters excavated in the river-bank added to the actual physical discomfort, while the sufferings of the wounded and the constant alarm of the shelling began to tell even on the most impassive nerves. Food was beginning to run low, and the end could not be deferred many days. Cronje was determined to hold on to the last

* Theron made his way out again before daybreak on the 27th.

mouthful. But the burghers were openly mutinous. Only the remarkable authority exercised by their leader had kept them in the trenches till then. But even that authority was powerless against the complete breakdown of the Boer *moral*. Deserters made their way across in daily increasing numbers to the British lines. A few crawled out through those lines; many more made the attempt, lost heart, and returned. On the morning of the 26th a *Krygsraad* was held to reconsider the question of the intended sortie. Hardly a voice was raised in its favour. The officers openly clamoured for surrender. By the utmost exertion of his influence, Cronje induced them to agree to hold on till the morning of the 28th. That afternoon the British bombardment was fairly heavy, and was reinforced by the fire of four 6-inch howitzers and three pom-poms—the first occasion of the employment of these guns by the British—and proved more than usually accurate, inflicting a considerable number of casualties, and breaking up the improvised bridge. A second *Krygsraad* was called that evening, and decided to surrender at 6 A.M. next day, though its decision does not seem to have been generally communicated.

Feb. 26. Roberts sanctions advance of Colvile's trenches.

Meanwhile the British had been slowly pushing towards the laager, and had made as much progress as could be expected on the assumption that no loss of life was to be incurred. Early on the 21st the Shropshires had pushed forward to within 550 yards of the Boer trenches, west of the laager, and constructed a trench by the river-bank, which was during the next few days steadily extended north-eastwards across the veld by different units of the 19th Brigade; a shorter trench was also made on the left bank. East of the laager Tucker's battalions had been more active, and, making full use of the many lateral dongas, had pushed forward a series of trenches on both banks, till by the 26th they held the positions reached by the Welsh and Essex on the 18th, some 600 yards from the laager and within 250 yards of the nearest Boer trenches. On the 26th Colvile, realizing that it was no use pushing his trench further across the veld, approached Roberts for permission for a further advance, backing up his request by the reminder that the

next day would be the anniversary of Majuba. Roberts consented. The task was assigned to the Canadians, whose turn it was to occupy the main trench. Colvile's intention was that the Canadians should try to rush the Boer position in the dark, but, if discovered, should halt and intrench themselves on the ground they had gained. The six companies assigned to the attack were formed up in double line, the front rank with fixed bayonets, the rear rank carrying picks and shovels. Lieut.-Colonel Kincaid, with 30 men of the 7th Company R.E., was to accompany the advance and help in the intrenching. The Gordons were meanwhile to occupy the main trench, and the Shropshires to support on their left rear. All other units on the investing perimeter had been warned to be specially on the alert, in case of an attempt to break out, of the possibility of which Roberts had been informed by deserters.

Feb. 27. The Canadian advance.

At 2.15 A.M. Colonel Otter took his men forward, Lieut.-Colonel Buchan leading the line on the left, Major Pelletier on the right. For nearly 500 yards the line advanced undetected. Suddenly, at 60 yards' range, a tremendous fire was opened on them from the Boer trench. The Canadians threw themselves down and replied vigorously, and the rear rank and Engineers at once began digging for dear life. On the left, indeed, the line failed to hold its own, and, after a few minutes, gave way. But G and H companies (Lieut. Macdonell and Captain Stairs), on the right, did not recede more than 20 yards at the most, and for nearly two hours kept firing away, while the trench was being completed. Daylight found the two companies admirably intrenched within 90 yards of the enemy, and in a position enfilading the whole of the enemy's trenches parallel to the river. At the same time Smith-Dorrien, who had superintended the whole attack, sent some men to occupy two stone huts just across the river to protect that flank from counter-attack. Soon after 5 A.M. the Boers made proposals to surrender, but it was not till 6 A.M. that a white flag was hoisted, and the firing stopped, most of the Boers in the trench coming over and surrendering to General Colvile, who by now had ridden up. The total casualties of this most successful advance

were 12 men killed, and three officers (including Major Pelletier) and 30 men wounded.

Cronje's surrender. Prisoners marched away.

Before this Cronje had sent in a flag of truce to the British headquarters with a message announcing that the Council of War had resolved to surrender unconditionally and throw themselves upon the clemency of her Britannic Majesty. Roberts at once ordered all firing to cease, and sent General Pretyman with a small escort to meet the Boer commander. Soon after 7 A.M. Cronje rode up to headquarters. Roberts, who was walking to and fro in front of the modest wagon which served him for office and dwelling-place, saluted, and, as Cronje dismounted, stepped forward and shook hands. The two men formed a striking contrast, the wiry little Field-Marshal in his plain, close-fitting khaki, with his Kandahar sword at his side, and the bulky Boer commandant in an old green overcoat, frieze trousers and slouch hat, swinging a short *sjambok* in his hand. "I am glad to see you. You have made a gallant defence, sir." Cronje was silent. The two, victor and vanquished, then sat down, and, with the help of an interpreter, arranged the details of the capitulation. This done, they breakfasted under the trees by the river bank. Meanwhile the Buffs were sent into the laager to bring out the prisoners, who were mustered by commandos on the south bank. There were 4,105 in all, including 150 wounded. Of these 18 officers and 2,592 men were Transvaalers, belonging almost entirely to the Western Transvaal: Potchefstroom, Bloemhof, Gatsrand, &c. The Free Staters only numbered 18 officers and 1,327 men, and were made up of small detachments of ten different commandos. Four guns and a pom-pom represented all their artillery. At midday the prisoners* started, marching off to Klip Drift under escort of the Gloucesters. It would be difficult to imagine a sight less suggestive of war than the long file of men which wound its way westward across the veld. In their dusty everyday clothes, with their few belongings wrapped up in gaudy handkerchiefs, or carrying striped blankets over

* Of the women and children most went to Jacobsdal, but a few chose to accompany their husbands as far as Cape Town.

MEETING OF LORD ROBERTS AND GENERAL CRONJE,
FEBRUARY 27TH, 1900.

From a Photograph by Mr. Perceval London

their arms, they resembled nothing so much as a gang of hop-pickers, but for the white or coloured umbrella which every second or third man was holding up to protect his weather-beaten features from the sun. Glad to escape from the stench and discomfort of the laager, satisfied with the stand they had made, they showed no signs of regret, but stepped out cheerfully on the road to their long captivity. Cronje, with his wife and a few of his retinue, passed them in a Cape cart and travelled in a special train to Cape Town. From there he, with all his men, was subsequently sent to St. Helena, to share the fate of a far greater captive of England's sword.

Estimate of Boer defence and British investment

The captured laager, with its hundreds of burnt wagons and scattered paraphernalia, presented a curious spectacle of devastation. But, from the military point of view, the only interesting feature were the trenches and burrows the Boers had everywhere excavated, both round the laager and still more under the steep river-banks. Deep and narrow, they offered complete protection against shrapnel, and even the lyddite shells had only proved effective when they had actually fallen into a trench. It is doubtful if the Boers suffered 100 casualties during the whole siege. As a military exploit, indeed, the defence of the laager hardly calls for much comment. The Boers showed a praiseworthy stubbornness in the endurance of great discomfort. But they were accustomed to a rough life, and even their noses were hardly as sensitive as those of the staff-officers or correspondents, whom the stench of the laager so nearly overpowered. They were never attacked till the last morning, and they never themselves summoned up courage to push back the British lines or to attempt a sortie. What applies to the Boers applies equally to the British. Except for the smell, the British troops, without tents and living on a daily ration of a biscuit and a half and a lump of tough trek-ox, endured almost as great discomfort as their opponents. Like their opponents, their attitude was also a purely waiting one. The advance of the Canadians was the only move of any boldness attempted after the 18th, and its easy success would suggest that it might have been undertaken as well

on the morning of the 20th as on the 27th. The risks and disadvantages of Roberts's policy of waiting have already been discussed at length. Success was attained, and though far less, both morally and strategically, than it might have been, it was still a great success. It marked the turning-point of the war. From that day onwards the Boers were a beaten nation, however obstinately they refused to acknowledge defeat. The British were conquerors, however slow and painful their own mistakes, and the determination of their adversaries, made the completion of their conquest.

Moral effect of successes of Feb. 27 in Empire.

On that same day Buller's troops at last broke their way through the Boer lines on the Tugela, and on the following afternoon Dundonald rode into Ladysmith. The news of this double success was received in England and throughout the Empire with unbounded enthusiasm. Of the two events, the one that in itself created the deepest emotion was the relief of Ladysmith. For months the fear of White's brave garrison falling or being starved into surrender had haunted every English mind. Men breathed freely once more when they knew that England had been spared a military humiliation greater even than that of Yorktown. And, profound as was the satisfaction over Paardeberg, it was not so much over the fact that the redoubtable Cronje and 4,000 Boers had been captured, as over the manner of that capture. That the Boers should be humiliated on that particular day seemed a fitting retribution for the past—how fitting was, perhaps, only appreciated by English South Africans, who, for twenty years, had borne with the self-satisfied arrogance of the victors of Majuba. That the final act which marked the surrender should have been the work of French and English Canadians, was an event whose significance for the future no one could fail to grasp. With the victory of Paardeberg, it was felt, the chapter of Little Englandism was finally closed, and the chapter of Imperial co-operation begun.

Effect on the Boers.

For the Boers Paardeberg was a terrible blow, from which they never recovered. For the first few days of Cronje's investment they had entirely failed to realize the full extent of the impending disaster, and had made no real effort to avert it. It was not till the 24th that the truth of the

situation dawned upon them, and then the time for effective action had passed. On Sunday, the 25th, at Kruger's suggestion, the clergymen and congregations of all the Dutch churches in the Transvaal held an all-night prayer for the relief of Cronje. A general service of thanksgiving and supplication was fixed for Majuba Day. But when the day came it was too late for supplications, and thanksgiving was far from their hearts. The one thought of all those who knew or guessed the bitter truth was expressed by Kruger in his admission: "The English have taken our Majuba Day away from us."

Boers abandon Colesberg. Clements enters Feb. 28.

From the closing scene at Paardeberg we must turn back again to the events that were taking place south of the Orange River. As early as the 17th, Roberts had urged Clements to push forward again, as the Boers were being withdrawn from Colesberg to meet his own advance. For the moment Clements was still compelled to stand on the defensive, but after the abortive Boer attack on the 20th he began turning the tables on his opponents. On the 24th, having meanwhile been reinforced by the 2nd and 39th Batteries, and by the 2nd Victorian Contingent from Hanover Road, he advanced and delivered an enveloping attack against the Boer positions in front of Kuilfontein Farm. The enemy made a determined stand, the German commando particularly distinguishing itself, and Clements did not press the attack home, though possibly he might have if he had realized that Schoeman's and Grobler's main wagon laager was concentrated behind the Kuilfontein ridges. This engagement, in which each side had about 30 casualties, was the last action worth mentioning in the Colesberg district. That same day orders arrived for De la Rey and Schoeman to proceed to Bloemfontein with all men that could possibly be spared. Leaving Grobler and Lemmer with, at the outside, 3,000 men to act as rearguard, the two generals marched off next day with over 2,000 men and entrained at Norval's Pont on the 27th. On that day the remnant of the Boer force evacuated Colesberg, while the British reoccupied Vaal Kop, Rensburg, and the Taaibosch-laagte. On the 28th Clements's whole force advanced, and he

himself entered Colesberg amid the heartfelt rejoicings of the loyalist inhabitants, who, in some instances, had suffered considerably from their Free State or rebel masters. A few had actually been confined to gaol, and these were now released and their places taken by some of the more prominent rebels who had had the assurance to remain behind.

Clements advances slowly towards Norval's Pont.

After resting his men for three days Clements began pushing forward on March 3 towards Norval's Pont, repairing the railway as he went along. The slowness of his movements provoked some criticism at the time. The explanation, however, is very simple. Kitchener, who came to Arundel on the 26th, had conveyed to Clements positive instructions from Roberts that he was not to push on, but to remain on the defensive, and this injunction was again repeated by Roberts on the 28th in the most categorical terms. The motive influencing these orders was Roberts's belief that it would be much easier to force the passage of the river at Bethulie and repair the railway there, and that it was therefore not worth while incurring casualties to force a second passage at Norval's Pont. It was not till Kitchener, on his return to Kimberley, made clear to Roberts the superiority of Norval's Pont from the traffic point of view that he allowed Clements to resume his march. In any case, too, Clements was dealing, not with a beaten enemy, but with one who was retreating deliberately and had made his arrangements beforehand. On the very day that he entered Colesberg he was informed that the Boer convoys were already at Norval's Pont and the road bridge. An immediate pursuit could have gained very little, and would not have accelerated the rate at which the railway could be repaired, which was the main task before him.

Operations in eastern Cape Colony.

Meanwhile the operations in eastern Cape Colony, on which at that time Roberts chiefly relied for the reopening of his communications when he struck the railway, had been progressing favourably, if somewhat slowly. In this quarter the British forces had not been appreciably weakened, except in ox-transport, for the purposes of Roberts's march. On the contrary, the formation of the Colonial Division added greatly to their effective total strength. In view of his instructions Gatacre would not, however, have been justified

in embarking on a forward policy involving serious risks. At the same time it is possible that, with a more skilful combination of the infantry and mounted troops, in French's style, using the former as his "pivots of manœuvre" and working forward with the latter on his flanks, the Boers might have been made as uncomfortable at Stormberg as at Colesberg. To a certain extent, indeed, this system was now being put in practice by the transference to Brabant of the greater part of Gatacre's mounted troops; in fact, during the clearing of eastern Cape Colony which accompanied Roberts's advance towards Bloemfontein, Gatacre's own force simply played the part of a pivot of manœuvre, while Brabant worked round the Boer flank. The relative position of the two commanders was not very clearly defined. In strict theory Brabant was Gatacre's subordinate, but in practice the Colonial Division acted for most purposes as an independent force.

Feb. 17. Brabant occupies Dordrecht. Delay in operations.

After a month of complete inactivity the Boers on February 6 made a sudden simultaneous attack upon the whole British front, concentrating in strength against Dalgety's position at Bird's River Siding. But they made no attempt to push the attack home, and fell back on the arrival of reinforcements from Sterkstroom. By the middle of the month Brabant had under his command over 1,800 men and nine miscellaneous guns, including four guns of the 79th Battery. On the 15th he marched off from Penhoek to within six miles of Dordrecht, and next morning attacked the Boers, who, with 600 men and two guns, had taken up a position covering the town. A sniping contest was carried on during the day, the British gradually driving in the Boer left. Before dawn on the 17th Captain Flanagan, of Brabant's Horse, led a bayonet charge against the main Boer position. But the Boers had already evacuated it, and now fell back on their main laager at Labuschagne's Nek, a strong position among rugged hills six miles north of Dordrecht. Brabant had less than a score of casualties, but his men were fairly exhausted, and he was short of transport and supplies. Accordingly, he made no attempt to dislodge the Boers, and, in spite of repeated messages from Roberts urging him

on, remained quiescent at Dordrecht for a fortnight, not thinking himself strong enough for an advance. Encouraged, perhaps, by his inactivity, the Boers from Stormberg made weak demonstrations against Penhoek and Bird's River Siding on the 19th. On the 23rd Gatacre conducted a reconnaissance in force against the Stormberg position, from which he concluded that, both in men and guns, the Boer force had been considerably reduced. This reconnaissance, otherwise successful, cost the lives of two of Gatacre's most valuable officers, Captain De Montmorency,* and Lieut.-Colonel Hoskier of Brabant's Horse. But in spite of the evident weakening of the Boers, and of messages from Kitchener recommending an advance, Gatacre did not feel strong enough to try and turn the Boers out of Stormberg, till an advance on Brabant's part should have completely cleared his flank.

March 4. Action at Labuschagne's Nek.

Brabant had meanwhile been getting together transport, and his force had gradually risen to nearly 3,000 men, including five companies of the Royal Scots temporarily attached to him by Gatacre after the 23rd. After carefully reconnoitring the Boer position at Labuschagne's Nek he now decided to capture it by a night march. His plan was to demonstrate with part of his force in front of the nek itself, while the main body, some 1,000 mounted Colonials, with two 15-pounders and two of the C.M.R. 7-pounders, the whole under Major Cedric Maxwell, R.E., made a detour of nearly ten miles and seized a mountain 1,500 feet high commanding the nek from the east. Moving off at midnight (March 3–4), and skilfully guided by a local farmer, Mr. W. Clarke, Maxwell halted his men at 4 A.M. just outside of striking distance, and formed them in four lines for the attack. At daybreak the Colonials galloped straight for the mountain. The picquets were completely surprised, and within half an hour the British were on the summit. But the slope down towards the nek was too open and gradual to enable them to reach the laager in the face of a heavy fire from the Boers, who were intrenched on the nek and supported by two guns. Even after Major Lukin, C.M.R.,

* See p. 119. De Montmorency was succeeded in the command of his scouts by Gatacre's aide-de-camp, Lieut. A. J. McNeill.

succeeded in dragging up his guns it was all that Maxwell's men could do to hold their own. Brabant, meanwhile, had pushed close up to the nek, shelling it vigorously. The Royal Scots were sent forward and almost reached the head of the pass. They failed, however, in a very gallant effort to dislodge the Boers from a conical kopje which enfiladed their right, whose capture would have enabled them to join hands with Maxwell's force. In the afternoon Brabant withdrew his men to Dordrecht, with the result that the Boers were able to turn their whole attention to Maxwell. But the Colonials held on with great determination, and towards evening succeeded in pushing forward their right, and establishing themselves in positions menacing the Boer line of retreat. On the morning of the 5th Maxwell was reinforced by 200 of the Border Horse from Queenstown, who at once proceeded to storm the Boer schanzes. By noon the whole Boer force was in full retreat towards Aliwal North. The troops, who had been 36 hours in action, were too tired for pursuit. The Boers, consequently, only lost a few prisoners and wagons. Their casualties may have been 40 or 50 out of a total of perhaps 1,000 men. The British lost 14 killed and 28 wounded. This was the last fight south of the Orange River, and on the part of the Boers was, no doubt, merely contested in order to cover the general retreat which Cronje's capture had rendered inevitable. Their preparations for evacuating Stormberg had already begun on March 3, and on the night of the 4th–5th the positions were finally abandoned. Gatacre, though informed of the retreat by his scouts, was unwilling to take any risks, and waited for the completion of the withdrawal before himself occupying Stormberg on the 5th.

Further halt of main army for rest and supplies.

Meanwhile, on the day after Cronje's surrender, Roberts had moved forward his headquarters to Stinkfontein. The troops at the same time shifted their bivouacs upstream of the laager. This move was mainly dictated by sanitary reasons. A real advance was not intended for another week. The cavalry and artillery horses were so weakened by their exertions and privations during the investment that a rest was very desirable. At the same time the rest would afford

an opportunity for replenishing supplies. In spite of keeping the troops on half rations till March 1, and subsequently on three-quarter rations, Roberts had not been able up to this to accumulate the large reserve of supplies which he wished to take with him on the march to Bloemfontein. At the moment, too, most of the wagons were away, having been off-loaded and sent back to the railway for further supplies, and were being seriously delayed by the state of the roads after the recent heavy rains. Every effort was made to supplement the deficiencies of the transport. From the beginning of the investment Mr. Rhodes had given most valuable assistance by sending small convoys of wagons which he had got together in Kimberley, and early on February 27 Roberts sent Colonel Johnson, A.S.C., to Kimberley to arrange with Rhodes to see what more could possibly be done. Nearly 100 serviceable wagons were found in the laager, and, together with those left by Cronje in his flight, practically covered the loss of the supply park at Waterval Drift. By the time Roberts was ready to start enough supplies had been brought up to keep the army on three-quarter rations of biscuits and groceries till the end of the month. So much, in fact, was accumulated at Stinkfontein that when the army moved the wagons were unable to carry it, and a large quantity of valuable supplies, mainly forage, was left behind. Most of this was spoilt by the rain, while the rest was destroyed, quite unnecessarily, by the last troops which left Stinkfontein, for fear of its being seized by the Boers.*

March 1. Roberts in Kimberley. Relief of Mafeking discussed

The days of waiting were not spent in inactivity. On March 1 Roberts rode into Kimberley in order to discuss affairs with Rhodes and Methuen, as well as with Kitchener, who had just come back from his tour of inspection. To

* The reason of this shortage of wagons was the demand made by the medical officers for wagons to take back sick and wounded to Kimberley. Some 80 or 90 wagons were diverted to this purpose, and though everything was done to get all the supplies on to the remaining wagons, by stripping off the wooden cases of the biscuit boxes, &c., nearly 50 wagon-loads had to be left. Why the sick and wounded could not have been left a few days longer, to be picked up by the same wagons returning after they had been emptied, is not apparent.

Rhodes Roberts broached a project for raising a purely local corps to march to the relief of Mafeking. But as Rhodes could not hold out any prospect of raising sufficient men in Kimberley for the purpose he decided that Methuen should make the attempt with his own force, strengthened in mounted men as it soon would be by the arrival of three battalions of Imperial Yeomanry, and, it was hoped, by the addition of at least 1,000 volunteers raised in Kimberley. On the 2nd orders were issued to Methuen, after clearing the country round Kimberley and Boshof, to secure the passage of the Vaal and push on to Mafeking along the railway. A few days later, however, on learning that not more than 500 troops could be raised in Kimberley, Roberts decided to leave Mafeking alone for the present. From Kitchener Roberts learnt not only about the state of affairs at Colesberg and Sterkstroom and the prospects of repairing the bridges, but also about the rebellion, which was now rapidly spreading in the western Cape Colony.

Measures to deal with western rebellion.

On February 15 some 600 Boers and rebels under Steenkamp and Liebenberg, with a couple of guns, had crossed the Orange River at Zwemkuil, below the junction of the Vaal, and had occupied Prieska next day. The district was proclaimed Free State territory, and British subjects who refused to become Free State burghers were given eight days in which to quit. A war commission of the leading local residents was formed, and within a week 300 rebels had been armed and organized in a commando. Emissaries were sent in every direction and the rebellion spread like wildfire. On the 28th Commandants Jooste and A. de Wet rode into Kenhardt, 100 miles further west, and here, too, a strong commando was soon under arms. By the beginning of March the spread of the rebellion threatened the districts of Upington, Calvinia, Carnarvon, and Victoria West, while the main body of Prieska and Griqualand rebels showed signs of advancing against Britstown and De Aar. The potential seriousness of the western rebellion was at once recognized by Milner, who had so often already warned Roberts of the danger from that quarter. It was from him that Roberts received, on February 20 and 21, several

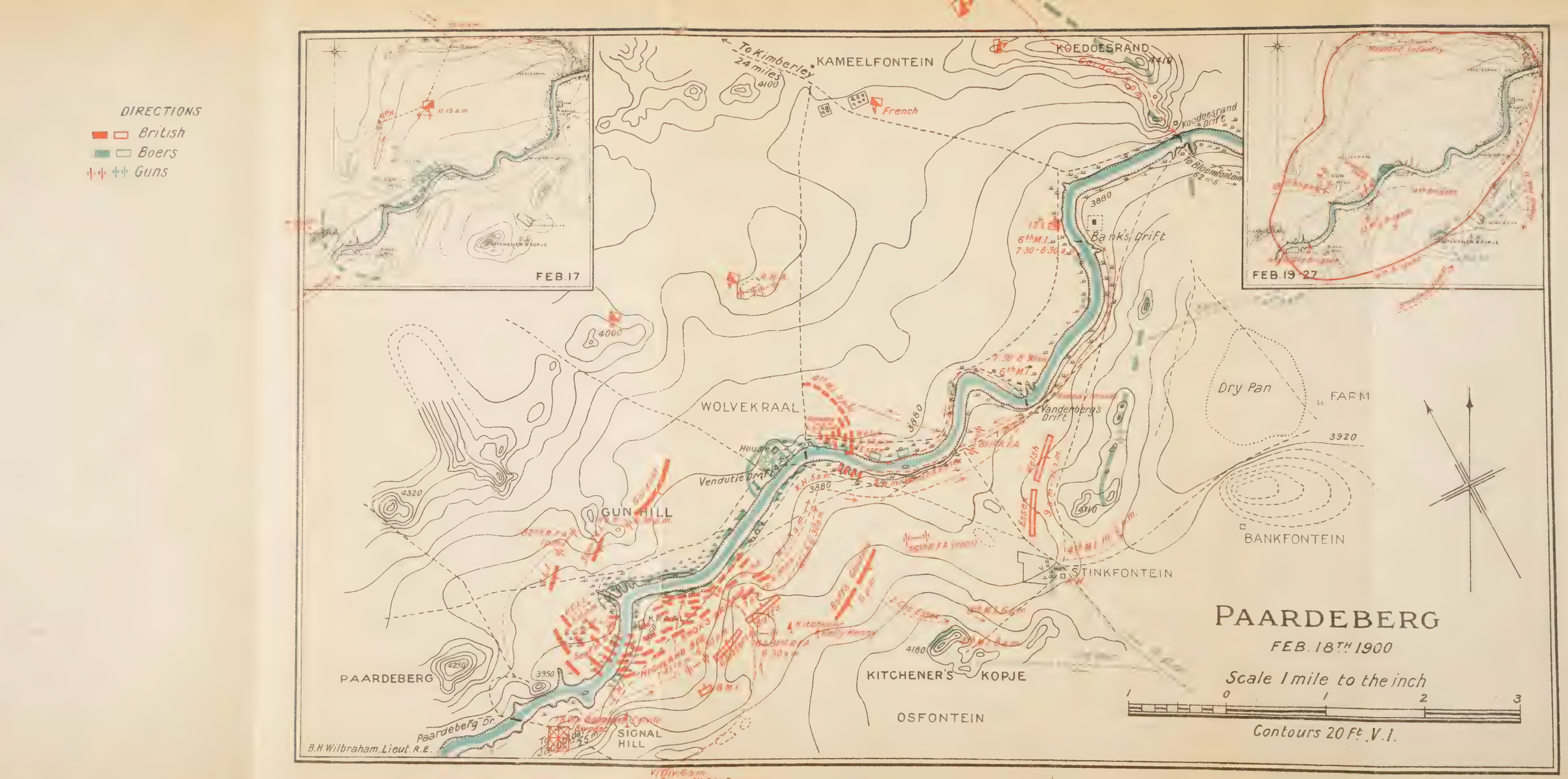
messages urging the necessity of immediate action to keep the rebellion within bounds. Roberts at once ordered Colonel J. Adye to proceed to De Aar and move out towards Britstown with the C.I.V., 300 M.I. and a battery, and ordered 500 Yeomanry to be sent to Carnarvon. On the 25th, in view of the growing seriousness of the rebellion, he ordered General Settle, commanding on the western line of communications, to undertake the pacification of the country west of the railway, and authorized him to make use of all available troops.

Strength and disposition of troops for further operations.

Leaving these arrangements in Settle's hands, Roberts, who had returned to Stinkfontein with Kitchener on the 1st, devoted his chief attention to the preparations for resuming his own advance. In spite of the arrival of sundry reinforcements his force had already begun to experience that extraordinary dwindling process to which all armies in the field are subject. By March 3 the total ration-drawing strength of the forces in the Free State, including the Guards Brigade, had sunk to 33,958 Europeans, 2,668 natives, 12,195 horses and 9,900 mules, and of these less than 25,000 fighting men were with the army at the front. In view of the steady concentration of the Boers at Poplar Grove, and of the prospect of serious fighting in front of Bloemfontein, it was essential to have a larger margin of safety. Accordingly the Guards, at Klip Drift and Klip Kraal Drift, Wavell's brigade and Flint's brigade division R.F.A., at Jacobsdal,* and sundry M.I. collecting at the Modder River, all received orders to be at Stinkfontein by March 7, on which date Roberts hoped to make a start. On their arrival the convoy route from Modder River Camp was to be abandoned, that from Kimberley being kept open for a day or two longer. The army was then to cut itself adrift, and live on what it could carry or find till it entered Bloemfontein and restored the railway to Cape Colony. The Mounted Infantry were now (March 4) reorganized in four brigades under Colonels Alderson, Le Gallais, Martyr and Ridley.† Alderson's brigade, which

* Wavell's brigade was replaced by the Highland Light Infantry as garrison of Jacobsdal.

† For the composition of these brigades see the diagram near the end of the volume.


DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
PAARDEBERG
FEB. 18TH 1900
Scale 1 mile to the inch
Contours 20 Ft. V.I.
FEB. 17
FEB. 19-27
KAMEELFONTEIN
KOEDOESRAND
To Kimberley 24 miles
French
Koedoesrand Drift
To Bloemfontein 62 ins.
Bank's Drift
WOLVEKRAAL
Vandenberg's Drift
Dry Pan
FARM
BANKFONTEIN
STINKFONTEIN
GUN HILL
Vendutie Drift
House
KRAAL
PAARDEBERG
Paardeberg Dr.
SIGNAL HILL
KITCHENER'S KOPJE
OSFONTEIN
B.H. Wilbraham, Lieut. R.E.
VI Div. Baggage
Mounted Infantry
Highland Brigade
Essex
Welsh
Buffs Glosters
Kitchener
Kelly Kenny
Highland Bde
Kitchener's Kopje

was left unaltered, served as a model for the rest, each of which was composed of two battalions of Regular M.I. and several squadrons of Colonials, the idea being that the Colonials, with their eye for country and better horsemanship, should leaven the still somewhat raw, though rapidly improving lump of improvised horsemen. On the same day orders were issued for the brigading and distribution of the Yeomanry. Brabazon, with the Yeomanry staff and the 1st, 2nd, 4th, 6th, 11th and 13th Battalions, was to proceed to Naauwpoort; Colonel Lord Chesham, with a brigade composed of the 3rd, 5th and 10th Battalions, was to join Methuen at Kimberley; the 7th, 8th, 9th and 12th were to be brigaded under Colonel Viscount Downe. In the sequel these arrangements were considerably modified, but they show that the next phase of the campaign, to follow upon the occupation of Bloemfontein, was already engaging Roberts's attention. With a view to these same future developments he had already, on February 27, insisted on the despatch of the Eighth Division from England, and for some days past had been pressing Buller to send round without delay the Fifth Division, now set free by the relief of Ladysmith. How that relief was finally effected, during the same days that witnessed the breakdown of the Boer resistance in the western area of operations, must now be told, before proceeding to the resumption of Roberts's march.

CHAPTER XVI

THE TUGELA HEIGHTS

The dash for Bulwana.

WHEN Buller, on February 7, finally abandoned Vaal Krantz, he informed White that he was going to "slip back" to Chieveley, drive the Boers off Hlangwane on the 10th, and the very next night attempt to take Bulwana from the south. To Roberts he described his intended operation as a "desperate effort" to capture Bulwana. This time, then, so it seemed, if never before, secrecy, rapidity, and desperate determination were really intended to characterize Buller's action.

The plan of attack. Reconnaissance to Hussar Hill.

The time Buller had allowed himself was, perhaps, almost too short, and on the 8th he signalled to White that he would take two days longer. While the force was following slowly —Lyttelton marching in on the 11th and Warren on the 12th—he himself spent the 10th and 11th at Chieveley, and considered the exact form his attack should take. The Boer positions on the right bank of the Tugela were no longer, as in December, confined to Hlangwane only, but extended, strongly intrenched, due east of it for over two miles along the left bank of the Gomba Spruit to a steep, but not very high, hill, afterwards known as Green Hill.* From here the trenches, now lighter and more scattered, were drawn back north-eastwards to the southern end of Monte Cristo, the bold and lofty central portion of the line of heights which stretches across for some six miles between the Tugela and the Blaauwkrantz. Buller decided to make the eastern or

* At least four hills which played a part in the operations of the next fortnight were called by this name, a sad case of paucity of invention; but in the present narrative the name will be confined to the one here mentioned.

outer flank of these positions the object of his attack. Barton suggested to him that he should march directly on Monte Cristo and Cingolo, the hill south-east of it, under cover of a feint on Hlangwane, and the next day send part of his force from Cingolo Nek eastwards over the Tugela, whence a fairly open and level country led up the valley of the Klip River to the eastern foot of Bulwana. But Cingolo Nek was seven miles away, and Buller preferred to advance by more gradual stages. On the 11th he ordered Dundonald to take out a mixed force * early next morning and intrench himself on a low, bush-covered rise, known as Hussar Hill, three miles east of the railway and facing Green Hill at about two miles distance across the Gomba. Hussar Hill was seized after slight opposition. Buller rode on to it, examined the Boer positions for nearly an hour, and then ordered the whole force back to Chieveley. The retirement was sharply harassed by the enemy's snipers. This change of plan, due, perhaps, to fear of a Boer attack, was veiled by describing the day's proceedings as a "reconnaissance." No plans were made for an early start on the 13th, and when the day turned out very hot Buller decided to do nothing. So much for the swiftness and desperate resolve of the dash on Bulwana. The much-disappointed White, seeing no signs of the relieving force on Bulwana that morning, anxiously inquired for news. At the same time he informed Buller that there had been a general movement among the Boer camps on the Upper Tugela on the previous day, and that many of the enemy had gone eastward. In other words, while Buller wasted time marching out to Hussar Hill and back again, the Boers had discovered that Burn-Murdoch's force at Springfield was only a blind, and were coming back to Colenso.

Procrastination at Hussar Hill.

At 7 A.M. on the 14th Buller moved out with Dundonald's brigade, the Second Division, now under Lyttelton, † and

* 2nd Cavalry Brigade, Welsh Fusiliers, a battery R.F.A., and some R.E.

† Clery being invalided. Lyttelton was succeeded in command of the 4th Brigade by Colonel Norcott. Of the 5th Division, Coke's brigade was short of the I.L.I., left at Springfield, while Wynne had left the York and Lancasters at Springfield and the Lancashire Fusiliers at Frere, but had received, instead, a composite battalion of Rifles composed of drafts for the 1st and 2nd K.R.R. and 2nd R.B. in Ladysmith, and commanded by

composed of the 2nd and 4th Brigades, and the Fifth Division, to the latter of which the 6th Brigade was also attached, and after some skirmishing occupied Hussar Hill. Lyttelton's leading battalion, the 60th Rifles, moved on to Moord Kraal, a low rise two miles further east, but were recalled, as Buller did not wish any further advance to be made that day. The troops intrenched themselves on a wide front, their right resting on the Gomba, their left somewhat drawn back. Barton's brigade was on Hussar Hill itself; Lyttelton to the right; Warren's division on the left; the mounted troops on both flanks. The idea next morning was that Barton's brigade should hold Moord Kraal to cover the advance of Lyttelton's division against Cingolo Nek. This was done by 8.30 A.M. But beyond that nothing happened. Lyttelton's division spent the whole morning moving a mile. The day was very hot; the troops were already tired with standing about in the burning sun. Lyttelton began to doubt the advisability of attacking Cingolo Nek without first securing Cingolo; and after he had conferred with Buller the attack was postponed for the day. On the 16th Lyttelton's division moved out cautiously against Cingolo. But the day was again hot, and, after advancing a little way, the troops were recalled, as "the object of the reconnaissance had been effected." During these days a vigorous but entirely objectless bombardment had been kept up on the Boer trenches on Hlangwane and Green Hill by the guns on Hussar Hill, as well as by those near the railway, which had been reinforced by a 6-inch naval gun on the 12th and by three more 4·7 guns on the 15th. The Boer guns behind Green Hill and a howitzer south of the Onderbroek Spruit, on the far bank of the Tugela, replied occasionally. In five days Buller had covered just five miles in his desperate dash for Bulwana. The weather during these five days was undoubtedly hot. But it was no less hot on the dusty plains of the Free State,

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Major Stuart-Wortley. A troop 13th Hussars, the 17th Co. R.E., and the 7th, 63rd, and 64th Batteries, R.F.A., were attached to Lyttelton's division; a troop of Royals, the 37th Co. R.E., the 28th, 73rd, and 78th Batteries to Warren. The 61st Howitzer Battery, 2 5-inch guns R.G.A., and 4 naval 12-pdrs. formed the Corps Troops.

and it was during these same days that Roberts's army did some of its hardest marches, trudging and staggering along to victory under the impulse of a clear directing brain and a keen will. It was the absence of these impelling factors, and not the heat, that was the real cause of the present futile performance. The heat was but an excuse for indecision and feebleness of purpose.

Boer positions on the right bank

If the operations up to this point had served any purpose whatever, it was to indicate to the Boers precisely the spot at which the British attack was to be delivered. Reinforcements had steadily come back from the Upper Tugela, and by the 16th there were from 5,000–6,000 Boers, with 12 guns, in and around Colenso.* Of these some 2,000–2,500, with four or five guns, held the positions on the right bank. The Bethel commando, with some of Wakkerstroom, held Hlangwane; the Middelburgers, under Fourie, held the Green Hill positions; the Heidelbergers and Boksburgers held the trenches further east, up to and including Monte Cristo, while on the 15th, in view of the obvious menace to Cingolo, Christian Botha, L. Botha's brother, occupied the slopes of that hill with some 300 Swazilanders. Lukas Meyer had been in command at Colenso during the operations on the Upper Tugela, and, though Joubert apparently now wished Botha to command, Botha was unwilling to assert himself against his former chief. For the present, therefore, the indolent and ineffective Meyer seems to have had the entire conduct of affairs in his hands—a serious misfortune for the Boers. The Boer position on the right bank was strong, but by no means impregnable. Its flank could easily be turned. Its means of communication with the left bank —a large ferry pont below the junction of the Onderbroek Spruit, and an ingeniously constructed bridge of railway sleepers and metals laid across the rocks just above the Falls—were very inadequate either for reinforcement or for

* Detachments were already withdrawn during these days to assist in repelling Roberts's invasion, but they were taken from the commandos on the Upper Tugela and subsequently from Ladysmith. Roberts's movements were effective, not so much in directly weakening the Boer force at Colenso as in preventing it from being reinforced when the critical moment arrived.

retreat, and neither the bridge nor the few drifts that could be crossed on horseback would be available in case of a sudden rise of the river.

Feb. 17. The attack on Cingolo.

At 5 A.M. on the 17th Buller gave Lyttelton verbal orders to attack Cingolo Nek and Monte Cristo. Dundonald was to co-operate on the right, while Barton and Warren's division were to support on the left and form the pivot of the whole movement. Being given a fairly free hand, Lyttelton decided to occupy Cingolo before entering the nek, though cavalry scouts who had climbed the southern end of the hill the day before had reported it unoccupied. He ordered Hildyard to attack the north-western end of the hill, while Norcott advanced directly towards the nek, and Barton supported. At 6 A.M. nearly fifty guns came into action from Hussar Hill and Moord Kraal against the trenches and wooded kloofs of Green Hill, Monte Cristo, and Cingolo. A few minutes later Lyttelton moved off, Hildyard's brigade leading, the others echeloned on the left. Progress was slow owing to the endeavour to maintain exact alignment over the rough bush-covered ground, and it was 9 A.M. before the West Yorks, Hildyard's leading battalion, came under long-range fire from Christian Botha's men on the western crest of Cingolo. At the same time the Boers crept forward in the bush and opened fire all along the line. A small party which had established itself on a knoll just across the Gomba, about half-a-mile south-east of Green Hill, was particularly effective, till Barton advanced the Irish Fusiliers, who cleared the knoll, and thus successfully covered both their own brigade and Norcott's from sniping. For this exercise of initiative Barton, whose orders had been not to cross the Gomba, was sharply reprimanded by Buller, and the Fusiliers were subsequently recalled. Meanwhile Hildyard, finding that his advance would meet with determined opposition, decided about 10 A.M. on a further outflanking movement. The Queen's were accordingly despatched through the bush to the right with orders to climb the south-western end of the hill, and then advance along the summit. This would take some hours, and Lyttelton meanwhile halted his line to give the flanking movement time to take effect.

Dundonald had bivouacked that night with the larger half of his brigade near the junction of the Gomba and Blaauwkrantz, some two miles east of the infantry. His orders, given him by Buller on the assumption of a direct attack on Monte Cristo, were to move behind the flanks of the infantry to protect them, and, if opportunity offered, to outflank any parties of the enemy that might appear on Cingolo Nek. Hearing during the night that the Boers were on Cingolo itself, he wisely decided to seize his opportunity and make a real turning movement. So instead of drawing into the west of Cingolo in rear of the infantry, as ordered, he took his men, some 650 in all, by a circuitous and hidden route to the extreme southern end of the hill. After an hour's climb through thick bush the head of the force reached a small plateau near the summit about noon, and began forming up. But the Boers were just becoming aware of the move and bullets were beginning to fly. Dundonald pushed on at once the Composite Regiment moving along the summit, the South African Light Horse on the eastern slopes. The Boers were too surprised to make an effective resistance. The irregulars never gave them a chance to stand, but swept the whole summit to Cingolo Nek. The Queen's, reaching the summit at 2 P.M., after an exhausting climb, found Dundonald's men ahead, and followed rapidly after. Unfortunately Dundonald does not seem to have communicated what he was doing to Lyttelton, and it was not till nearly 3 P.M. that the cessation of the fire from the Boers on the crest, and the sight of the Queen's in their place, made the situation clear to him. He pushed forward again and occupied the lower slopes of Cingolo and a small kopje half-way up to the nek. The Boers, who had fallen back from the nek, kept up a hot fire from Monte Cristo, Green Hill, and the intervening ground, and he now swung his troops more to the left in preparation for the attack. But it was already 5 P.M.; by the time the attack was pushed home it would be dark, and it would be difficult to make full use of the victory gained. Buller accordingly ordered the troops to stand fast and bivouac in the positions they occupied. It had been a fairly successful day, thanks largely to Dundonald's initiative, and to Lyttel-

Dundonald seizes Cingolo. Further advance postponed.

ton's sensible dispositions. What prevented the success from being complete was, partly, the lack of communication between Dundonald and Lyttelton, and, partly, Lyttelton's own decision to wait for the development and completion of the flank attack, instead of continuing to press on. Had he done so he might have lost a few more men, but he would probably have been in a position to strike home, possibly to cut off the Boers on Cingolo, as soon as the flank attack made itself felt.

Feb. 18. Attack on Monte Cristo. Lyttelton's plans.

At dawn on the 18th Lyttelton issued his orders for the attack, which he intended to be a continuation of the previous day's manœuvre. Hildyard and Dundonald on the right of the line were to push on and envelop the enemy's flank on Monte Cristo. As soon as this was done Norcott in the centre, and Barton on the left, were to swing the whole line forward through another quadrant of a circle, pivoting on Warren's troops on their left, and clear Green Hill and the ridge connecting it with Monte Cristo. The chief difficulty of Hildyard's attack lay in securing adequate artillery support, as the position to be taken was out of effective range of the guns on Hussar Hill and Moord Kraal, excepting the two 5-inch guns. In view of this, Lyttelton, with commendable forethought and enterprise, had ordered the 64th Battery to be dragged up during the night to the little knoll halfway up to the nek. The gunners, aided by the Devons, were hard at work all night dragging the guns and ammunition up by hand, distributing the guns in suitable positions, and erecting cover. But their labours were amply rewarded in the morning. Lyttelton's orders for the battery were not to open fire till the infantry advance disclosed the enemy's position, a considerable improvement in tactical conception upon the ordinary futile "preparation" of several square miles of country on the chance of hitting such Boers as might be about. With the same object in view he ordered Hildyard to prepare his advance freely with long-range rifle-fire before attacking.

Attack of the 2nd Brigade.

At 5.30 A.M. Hildyard opened the action with long-range volleys from the Queen's on the northern crest of Cingolo, and with a heavy fire from his Maxims, which he had moved

on to the slope just south of Cingolo Nek. Colonel Kitchener moved the West Yorks up to Cingolo Nek and joined in the preparatory fire against the face of Monte Cristo. Dundonald did the same on the north-eastern slope of the hill, while such of the artillery as had the range supported vigorously. An early attack was desirable, in order to enable the capture of the Boer position to be well followed up, but it was not till 10 A.M. that the cautious Hildyard was satisfied that his preparation had been sufficient. A few minutes later the leading half battalion of the West Yorks on the left, followed on the right by half the Queen's, rushed across the open nek. The Boers on the slope and crest of Monte Cristo opened a heavy fire, but their aim was not improved by the effective supporting fire directed upon them by the rear half battalions of the West Yorks and Queen's across the nek. A little later these crossed in their turn, effectively assisted by the fire of the advanced line, which had found good positions among the rocks and bushes at the foot of the slope. The Devons and half the East Surreys followed next, the other half of the latter battalion being kept lower down Cingolo to fire long-range volleys. The advance then began. Slowly and steadily the infantry worked their way up, the steepness of the slope not only affording cover, but facilitating the task of the supports. The Boers made their way back to the crest. But even there they could not hold their own against the heavy rifle and shrapnel fire directed upon them. Just before midday the leading company of the West Yorks scrambled up the last, almost precipitous stretch, and reached the summit. A heavy fire was at once opened from positions further back, killing Captain Berney, the first man on the crest. A moment later the whole firing-line, West Yorks, Queen's, and Devons, were over the crest, and, sweeping forward, cleared the end of the hill. The Boers promptly opened on them from behind Green Hill with two guns, a pom-pom, and a Maxim. The troops were withdrawn from the crest, but continued pushing northwards along the eastern edge of the hill, now joined by Dundonald's men on their right.

While Hildyard was preparing his attack, Norcott had

4th and 6th Brigades capture Green Hill.

swung round his brigade so as to face the ridge between Green Hill and Monte Cristo. Barton's brigade was extended on his left facing the Green Hill. As soon as Lyttelton saw that the summit of Monte Cristo was won he sent Norcott forward. The advance met with a heavy fire, but was most effectively supported by the 7th Battery, which Buller had sent across the Gomba early in the morning, and which now came into action below the 64th in a position which enabled it to shell the Boer trenches and the laagers behind at 1,600 yards' range. At 12.30 P.M. Lyttelton halted the 4th Brigade to enable Barton to come up on the left. Barton was, probably, reluctant to assume the initiative after his previous day's experience, but after a while, seeing the 4th Brigade waiting, he decided that it was essential to push on. Sending back word to inform Warren and Buller on Hussar Hill, he sent his men forward. Meanwhile the 2nd Brigade had pushed more than half-a-mile along the summit, and at 1.30 P.M. once more crossed over on to the western crest and opened a heavy fire on the Boer laagers below them. The effect was almost instantaneous. The whole Boer resistance collapsed. The moment the 2nd Brigade appeared, Norcott, with whom Barton had now drawn level, pushed forward again. But it was too late. By 2.15 P.M. the Scots and Irish Fusiliers had scaled Green Hill, and a few minutes later the Rifle Brigade and Durham L.I. were over the ridge to their right front. But the Boers were already well away, retiring in such order and in so leisurely a fashion that the 7th Battery, which came on to the ridge immediately after, took them for Dundonald's men and forebore to fire. The irregulars, as it happened, were on the eastern slope of Monte Cristo, where they continued, together with some of the 2nd Brigade, pressing after the retreating Boers up to the point where the mountain falls in a sheer, almost precipitous, slope of over 1,000 feet to the Tugela.

Criticism of the day's operations.

The day's operations had thus far proved decidedly successful. The attack of the 2nd Brigade on Monte Cristo had been well thought out and skilfully conducted. It had no doubt been facilitated by the cover afforded by the scrub,

which Buller had hitherto so much dreaded. But the essential cause of its success was the fact that it had only to deal with the Boers actually opposite it, while the rest of the Boer force was kept in its trenches by Norcott and Barton, who were simultaneously brought into action along a front of about two miles, and effectively supported by the whole artillery. It is this bringing of his whole force into play that differentiated Lyttelton's tactics on the 17th and 18th from Warren's and Buller's at Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, and enabled him with a loss of about 200 casualties to drive the Boers out of positions they had held and intrenched ever since December. If, indeed, the capture of positions with the smallest loss of life, and not the destruction of the enemy's forces, were the primary object of war, no fault whatever could be found with Lyttelton's tactics. But, as it is, it must be admitted that, on the 18th as on the 17th, success was frustrated of its completeness by the reluctance to develop the frontal attack together with the attack on the flank. To have done so might have cost another 200 casualties. But it would probably have enabled Norcott and Barton to get home effectively and to punish the Boers in their retreat. Moreover, though the tactics of the 18th showed a marked improvement on previous performances, as far as Lyttelton's division was concerned, this was not true of the force regarded as a whole. No attempt was made by Buller to bring Warren's division into action on the left, or to make use of Hart's brigade at Chieveley, though the simultaneous capture of Hlangwane by the left wing of his force would have made it very difficult for the Boers on Green Hill or Monte Cristo to escape across the river.

Buller refuses to pursue.

Even as it was, there was still plenty of opportunity for effective action after the capture of the Green Hill–Monte Cristo line. Barely four miles of rolling, bushy plain separated the infantry from the inadequate crossing to which the Boers were now making a leisurely retreat. A prompt pursuit might still have caught them in the act of crossing and inflicted the losses required to complete the moral effect of the victory. Such an advance would not only have affected the retiring Boers on the right bank, but also those on the

left, whose laagers and positions, from Fort Wylie to the Onderbroek Spruit, would all have been exposed to reverse artillery fire, and thrown into confusion. Under cover of this confusion and of darkness it might even have been possible to secure a crossing that night and to establish a bridge-head near the Falls, preparatory to a further advance on the morrow. It is interesting to speculate how Kitchener would have used this opportunity had he been in Natal that day instead of at Paardeberg! Buller, at all events, had not the slightest intention of pressing after his beaten enemy. The very moment the troops got into the Boer positions he sent an order to Lyttelton to stand fast and collect his men on the defensive, as the enemy were "apparently receiving large reinforcements from Ladysmith." Barton was anxious to push on to the Boer bridge, but was ordered to stop, and found that he had again incurred Buller's displeasure for having done what the situation obviously demanded without waiting for specific orders.

The Boer withdrawal.

The Boer force accordingly retired unmolested across the Tugela, their retreat covered by the fire of their guns on the left bank. The Bethel commando, however, remained in their positions on Hlangwane. Botha, who had appeared on the scene of operations on the previous day, though too late to remedy Meyer's dispositions, had not yet wholly given up the hope of holding at least a portion of the right bank. At nightfall he sent the Heidelbergers across the river to reinforce Hlangwane, of whose tactical importance he was still as convinced as he had been three months earlier. But in spite of Botha's promise to reinforce them, the Bethelers abandoned Hlangwane after dark, and the Heidelbergers, failing to get into touch with them, did not advance beyond the long spur which runs northward from Hlangwane to the Falls. On the left bank all was confusion. The laagers were hastily broken up, and before darkness miles of wagons were visible trekking northwards past Pieter's Station.

Feb. 19-20. Buller cautiously advances to the river.

No further movement was made by Buller till 8 A.M. on the 19th, when the whole force, after a prolonged artillery "preparation," advanced very cautiously for nearly two miles. Barton marched to Hlangwane, which Thorneycroft's M.I.

had already found unoccupied, and Norcott to Bloy's Farm, while the East Surreys established themselves on the highest part of Monte Cristo overlooking the river. A further advance Buller would not hear of. On Hlangwane, Barton's men came under shell-fire from guns on the left bank, as well as under rifle-fire from the Heidelbergers to the north of them. These last, indeed, made a somewhat half-hearted counter-attack during a shower early in the afternoon, which was, however, easily repulsed by the Royal Fusiliers. Most of the guns, now reinforced by two more 5-inch guns and two 4·7's, were brought forward to the Bloy's Farm plateau. Two naval 12-pounders reached the northern summit of Monte Cristo by 3 P.M., having been on their way ever since the previous evening. The sailors had a fine opportunity for shelling some of the retreating Boer laagers across the river, but were under strict orders not to fire till they had constructed epaulements. The Composite Rifles occupied Colenso without opposition. During the night the Boers resolved to abandon the right bank entirely. The Heidelbergers were withdrawn, the ferry pont was burnt, and the bridge partially destroyed. Learning that the coast was clear, Buller, on the morning of the 20th, at last sanctioned a cautious advance, covered by heavy artillery fire, over the remaining two miles to the edge of the plateau overlooking the Tugela. The 2nd Brigade was brought down off Monte Cristo to assist in this manœuvre, only the East Surreys and 12-pounders being left on the hill. Hart meanwhile had marched the Dublin Fusiliers from Chieveley into Colenso, where they had a slight skirmish with a few Boers on the kopjes across the river. Thorneycroft, with a small party of the T.M.I., crossed the river, and the Boers withdrew. In the evening Hart was ordered to retire to Chieveley again. Coke's brigade occupied Hlangwane.

Alternatives before Buller: the tactical crossing.

After wasting two whole days Buller had advanced no further than he might have gone on the afternoon of the 18th. The question of what he was to do next still remained, and there was no longer any conceivable excuse for putting it off. The essential thing, indeed, was that he should do something at once. The exact tactical or strategical form of the plan

adopted mattered little if only it was carried out with promptitude and energy. In war most plans are good, except deferred plans. Still, broadly speaking, there were two main lines of action open to him. The first was to cross the Tugela where he was and dislodge the Boers from their positions on the left bank. Along the whole length of the river from the western foot of Hlangwane to Monte Cristo the right bank commanded the left and enabled Buller to force a crossing under cover of his guns. He could cross at Colenso and endeavour to envelope and force back the Boer right on Grobelaar's Hill and Onderbroek in the same way that Lyttelton had forced back their left on Cingolo and Monte Cristo. He could cross over near the Falls, either by repairing the Boer bridge—as was, in fact, done, sufficiently for infantry purposes, by the Scots Fusiliers during the next few days—or by his own pontoons, and then force his way over the single line of hills that here formed the northern rim of the Colenso basin. Lastly, he could, with a view to getting on to the plain east of Pieter's and outflanking the Boer left, cross his men, though not, perhaps, his wagons or guns, at some point lower down between the Falls and the mouth of the tremendous gorge which separates Monte Cristo and its north-westerly continuation, Clump Hill, on the one bank of the Tugela from the sheer cliffs of Eagle's Nest * on the other.

The strategical move to head off the Boers.

The second line of action open to Buller was strategical rather than tactical in its scope. It was the line already advocated by Barton, and now strongly urged by more than one officer on Buller's staff, namely, that of avoiding altogether the great amphitheatre of hills round Colenso, and making, instead, a flank march through Cingolo Nek to the junction of the Klip River and the Tugela, and thence up the open valley of the former river to the rear of Bulwana. The march in question would have been nearly 20 miles altogether, and would have involved the construction of a pontoon bridge. But it presented no insuperable obstacles. And it promised great strategical results. At Bulwana, Buller would be astride of the main line of communications of all the Boer

* Also known as Manxa Nest or Aasvogel Kop.

positions at Colenso and on the south side of Ladysmith, and would render them untenable. Unless the Boers detected the object of his manœuvre at once—and Roberts's experience of a similar march in perfectly open country indicates the unlikelihood of this—he would cut off all possibility of a retreat by the east of Ladysmith. Forced to retire by the west, the Transvaalers, who formed the bulk of the forces thus cut off, would have to make their way round more than a complete semicircle. Buller, meanwhile, would only have to march straight through Ladysmith, picking up such troops as were still effective, in order to head them off. The strategical situation offered all the elements for a success as great as that of Paardeberg.

Buller's only object to get to Ladysmith.

In discussing the opportunities which now presented themselves to Buller, one assumption has, however, been made. And this is that Buller desired to close with his enemy and to inflict a crushing defeat upon him. Unfortunately neither Buller's actions, nor the language of his orders and messages, show the slightest trace of any such desire. The only desire he entertained was to get to Ladysmith: the less he had to do with the Boers on the way, the better. He had waited two whole days to allow the Boers to evacuate their last positions on the right bank of the Tugela. His hopes and expectations now centred, so it would seem, on their evacuating the left bank also, and allowing him to make his way to Ladysmith unopposed. And, indeed, there were many indications that looked favourable to this hope. All day on the 19th and 20th the Boer wagons streamed away in unbroken lines over the shoulder of Bulwana, and with them went a considerable number of burghers. Telegrams from Roberts and from White confirmed the view that the Boers were going.* No attempt was made, however, to find out by scouting what really was happening across the river. Buller had completely lost touch with the enemy and made not the slightest effort to regain it.

* Roberts, it is true, coupled his information, both on the 18th and 20th, with exhortations to push on to Ladysmith, while White was anxious to know where Buller intended to attack, in order that he might try to co-operate.

His conviction that the Boers were going.

The only conspicuously visible indication that did not point to retreat was the presence of a few Boers digging trenches and building sangars on the hills north of the Falls. But the scene was very unlike that which Buller had watched from Mount Alice on January 12, when several thousand Boers were feverishly intrenching on Brakfontein. The general impression conveyed to Buller and to most of those who had been present on both occasions was that the work now being done was a mere precaution to enable a weak rearguard to delay the pursuit and allow the wagons to get well away. With this impression, and with his general attitude towards the problem before him, Buller was not likely to give very serious consideration to strategical or tactical schemes, involving great exertions for the troops, and possibly difficulties of supply, when all he had to do was to wait a little longer for the Boers to get away, and then to march comfortably to Ladysmith by the high road. It was in this frame of mind, apparently, that he rode up Monte Cristo, for the first time, on the afternoon of the 20th. What he saw from there of the Boer movements confirmed his hope. On the other hand, the sight of the deep gorge at his feet only strengthened his unwillingness to contemplate any movement in this direction. He, however, yielded to the importunity of the staff officer with him, to the extent of sending a young engineer with a patrol, to see if he could find a road suitable for transport and a convenient crossing east of Monte Cristo. The patrol apparently did not penetrate to the open country, for it reported that no road was to be found. But, in any case, Buller's mind was now made up. The Boers were going, and he would follow them quietly to Ladysmith, as he had followed them from Monte Cristo to the bank of the Tugela. The pontoon was accordingly marched to Hlangwane during the afternoon in readiness for a crossing on the morrow. Orders were at the same time sent to Burn-Murdoch to break up the camp at Springfield, and come in to Chieveley; and to Bethune to cross the Tugela and move on Helpmakaar. The relief of Ladysmith was practically accomplished: it was only necessary to march in.

Boer demoralization. Botha advises retreat to Biggarsberg. Kruger's reply.

It was in this spirit that Buller telegraphed to White next morning that he was pushing through to Pieter's, with only a rearguard in front of him, and hoped to be in Ladysmith on the following evening. His message crossed one from White announcing that Boer reinforcements had arrived at Modder Spruit station, and that during the last two days some 750 Boers had been seen riding south past Bulwana, to which White now added that he could detect no signs of the enemy's retreating; all the indications pointed the other way. The fact is that the Boers had undoubtedly been thrown into complete panic on the 18th, and that not only the wagons, but large numbers of burghers trekked away during the next two days. Botha, who had, with but little success, endeavoured to stay the backward movement, and to get the burghers together to intrench a second series of positions, was so impressed by the general demoralization, that he telegraphed to Joubert on the 19th suggesting that the siege of Ladysmith should be raised, and the whole Boer force withdrawn to the Biggarsberg. Meyer and the other commandants concurred in his view. Coming as it did at the same moment as the news of Cronje's unfortunate plight at Paardeberg, this despondent message might well have shaken the most obstinate determination of the Transvaal leaders. It might also have suggested compliance with Botha's advice, as the best means of enabling them to send more men to help Cronje. But neither Kruger nor Joubert were yet ready to sacrifice the prize for which they had contended for so many months. Joubert telegraphed back ordering Botha to stop, and to allow no leave on any pretext for the next fortnight. He even drove across from Modder Spruit himself on the 20th, and remained for a short while on Grobelaar's Hill, looking round and discussing the situation. Kruger's reply, indeed, is a document so characteristic, both in style and in spirit, as to merit quotation, at least in part:—*

"Your telegram yesterday with regard to the position on your side. Worthy sirs and brethren: It seems to me as if your faith

* After Cronje's surrender and the relief of Ladysmith this same message was published by Kruger as an address to the burghers of both Republics.

and that of your burghers has been replaced by unbelief. The moment that you cease to hold firm and fight in the name of the Lord, then you have unbelief in you; and the moment unbelief is present cowardice follows, and the moment that you turn your backs on the enemy then there remains no place for us to seek refuge, for in that case we should have ceased to trust in the Lord. No, no, my brethren; let it not be so; let it not be so. Has not the Lord hitherto given us double proof that He stands on our side? Wherever our burghers have stood fast, however hard the task, the Lord has beaten back the enemy with a small number of our burghers. My brethren, is it not the same Lord that cleft the Red Sea and routed Pharaoh and all his host, when Moses stood firm in his faith? Is it not, again, the same Lord that caused the stream of water to spring from the rocks whence thousands could drink? Is it not still the same Lord who walked on the sea and rebuked the waves of the sea and the winds, and they obeyed Him? . . . It seems to me from a study of God's word that we live at a point of time spoken of in the Revelation, in which the Beast has received power to persecute the Church of Christ in order to purify her, as gold is purified through fire. . . . This, indeed, is the struggle for the crown, both in a material and in a spiritual sense. Read Psalm xxvii., verse 7, where the Lord says, 'Be of good courage, little band of God-fearing ones.' The Lord is faithful, and in your weakness shall He make perfect His strength. Read Psalm xxxiii., verse 7, to the end, where it says that victory is in the hand of the Lord alone, and not with the multitude of horses and chariots. . . . No, brethren, let us not bring all our posterity to destruction. Stand fast in faith to fight, and you shall be convinced that the Lord shall arise and shall scatter His enemies (Psalm lxvii.). Our faith is now at its utmost test, but the Lord will now shortly prove that He alone lives and reigns. The young men preferred death in the fiery furnace to forsaking their faith. Our ancestors preferred the stake to abandoning their faith, and the Church has been preserved, and all those that have preferred death to forsaking their faith have been as a sacrifice on the altar. Read this out to all officers and burghers, and my faith and prayer lie in my firm confidence that the Lord shall strengthen His people in their faith. Even if they have no earthly rock behind which to seek cover, they shall win on the open plain."

DIRECTIONS

British

Boers

The solid lines indicate positions taken up

The dotted lines movements of forces.

Camps & headquarters of forces.

Reconnaissance Allenby

Reconnaissance De Lisle. Jan. 11.

Reconnaissance Grabler Feb. 10.

Grabler in force. Jan. 25.

Plessis Poort

Rietfontein

Wolve Kop

Spitz Kop

To Colesberg Wagon Bridge 10 Miles

De Poort Farm

Basters Nek

JAN. 11.–FEB. 10.

BOER FRONT JAN. 1.–FEB. 13.

Hobkirk's Farm

Grabler Feb. 10.

Grabler Feb. 10.

Wilts. S. Australians. Victorians. Jan. 12.

Pink Hill

Buffel's Vlei Fm.

10 Hussars. Jan. 3.

Piet De Wet Jan. 3.

Windmill Camp

De Lisle Jan. 3.

Jan. 1.

Kloof Camp

Suffolk Jan. 1–7. Essex. Jan. 8.

Suffolk Jan. 6.

Suffolk or Grassy Hill

Jan. 8.

Coles Kop

Gibraltar Hill

Mc Crackens or Berkshire Hill

Station

Berkshires Jan. 1–Feb. 12.

COLESBERG

Fisher. Jan. 1.

Skietberg

COLESBERG JUNCTION

1 Clements Feb. 28.

Maodels Farm

Fisher. Dec. 31.

Porters Hill

Jan. 1.

Porter. Dec. 30.

Roode Kopjes

Klein Platberg

FRENCH & CLEMENTS FRONT JAN. 10.–FEB. 27.

Plewmans Siding

Palmietfontein

Gentles Mt

BOER POSITIONS DEC. 8–28 & FEB. 14–27.

Slachter's Farm

Dec. 8.

Kuilfontein Farm (Plewmans)

Piet de Wet Dec. 16.

Karroo

Madoc

Royal Irish Jan. 18. Feb.

Haverman Dec. 16.

Vaal Kop Farm

Dec. 8.

Vaal Kop

Dec. 11–16.

RENSBURG STATION

1 H.Q. French & Clements Dec. 30.–Feb. 13.

Rensburg Farm

Kraaifontein

Clements. Feb. 24.

KARROO

BOER POSITIONS DEC. 29. & FEB. 14–27.

Signal or Picket Hill

TAAIBOSCHLAAGTE

Jasfontein

Olifants

BRITISH FRONT DEC. 7–30 & FEB. 14–23.

Inniskilling Hill

Porter Dec. 7.

Rietfontein Farm (Rensburg)

Rietfontein Farm (Foster)

ARUNDEL STATION

Camp Hill

1 French Dec. 17.

Modderfontein

Reconnaissance. Dec. 18.

Reconnaissance Nov. 21.

To Naauwpoort 14 Miles

COLESBERG OPERATIONS

FROM

NOVEMBER 21ST 1899 TO MARCH 15TH 1900.

Scale - 1·5 miles to 1 inch.

1 2 3 4½ 6 7½ 9

Contours 100 Feet V.I.

Surveyed by
MAJOR HOVELL
2ND WORC. REGT

Spottiswoode & Co. Ltd. Lith. London.

Even more encouraging than Kruger's message, perhaps, was Buller's continued inactivity. The burghers rapidly recovered from their panic, and, as White reported, those who had fled now began returning to the positions to which Botha and his stalwarts had been clinging. By the morning of the 21st there were probably 5,000 Boers established and partially intrenched in a complete line of positions extending from the heights west of Colenso on the right to beyond Pieter's Hill on the left, and divided into two equal halves by the Langverwacht Spruit. Lukas Meyer commanded the left wing with the Piet Retiefers on the extreme left, the Heidelbergers, Lydenburgers and some Standerton men on the Pieter's Heights east of the railway, and the Johannesburgers, Boksburgers, Krugersdorpers and Rustenburgers on the hills afterwards known as Railway and Inniskilling Hills, between the railway and the Langverwacht. Botha commanded the more immediately threatened right wing, with the Ermelo and Middelburg men on the low hills known afterwards as Wynne Hills, and beyond them, in the underfeatures of Grobelaar's, and on both sides of the valley of the Onderbroek, the Carolina, Bethel, Swaziland, Standerton and Zoutpansberg contingents. Of their guns, a Krupp and a pom-pom were well out on the flank, on high ground west of the Onderbroek, two Creuzots and a howitzer on the lower plateau of Grobelaar's, two pom-poms, a howitzer and two field-guns at various points in rear of Meyer's positions west of the railway. But though the Boers had recovered courage sufficiently to take up these positions, they were still very unsteady. Their leaders looked to the impending advance with the greatest anxiety, hardly daring to hope that the burghers would sustain a determined attack at any point. That Buller had no intention of attacking at all, but was simply proposing to trundle his army by road all along the front of their positions, and between them and the Tugela, was more than they could have imagined in their wildest dreams.

Boers take up new positions. Their unsteadiness

Buller's orders on the morning of the 21st were simplicity itself. The troops, first line transport, artillery and all, were to cross over as soon as the pontoon bridge was thrown across the Tugela immediately west of Hlangwane, and then turn

Feb. 21. Buller begins crossing over. Somerset L.I. in action.

to the right and follow the river. Warren's division was to go first, then Lyttelton's. Barton, whose brigade was extended along the right bank to the Falls, was to cover the movement, helped by the artillery. Hart was to cross at Colenso and occupy the Colenso Kopjes in order to cover the left rear. At 10.30 A.M. the bridge was begun under intermittent fire from the Boer guns, and finished three hours later. Meanwhile Thorneycroft, who had crossed over with his men at Colenso soon after daybreak, had sent several messages back to Warren informing him that a large body of Boers were in the bed of the Onderbroek Spruit south of Grobelaar's, on the flank of the proposed advance. In view of this, Buller decided to let the advance wait while the Boers were shelled, and thus induced to hasten their departure. Coke, whose brigade was the first to cross, was ordered to push forward his men across the plain west of the low bridge-head kopjes, so as to cover the coming into action of a couple of batteries. At 2 P.M. the 10th Brigade began to cross, and occupied the bridge-head kopjes without further opposition than a certain amount of shell-fire. But the moment the Somerset Light Infantry, Coke's leading battalion, debouched on to the open plain beyond, they met with heavy rifle-fire from their right front and from two low kopjes 1,000 yards away on their right flank. Coke sent two of their companies and half the Dorsets to take these kopjes, but, though this was successfully done, the pressure on the Somersets' right flank was not much eased. They pushed on gallantly, and eventually were halted some 1,300 yards in front of the bridge-head kopjes. With admirable steadiness they remained lying in the open for the rest of the afternoon, subject to galling short-range fire from almost every quarter, as the Boers, undeterred by the shrapnel of the guns, which came into action about 4 P.M., flocked down to the Onderbroek, to get such good shooting as they had not had for many a long day. After dark Coke withdrew his men from their untenable positions. This first encounter with the Boer "rearguard" cost the Somersets 90 casualties, including 4 officers killed; some 20 casualties fell to the rest of the brigade.

On the Boers the effect of the day was almost magical. Their drooping spirits had begun to revive the moment they saw Buller enter the Colenso basin, stepping down, as it were, into the arena of the amphitheatre to be shot at from the seats. The futile advance of the Somersets, which they interpreted as an unsuccessful attack, completed their rehabilitation. That evening Botha telegraphed to Kruger:— Prompt revival of Boer spirits.

"Thanks to our Father the burghers already showed to-day that they had taken heart again, when they had such splendid shooting at the enemy with their Mausers at 300 yards' range. As soon as the moon rises I will go along our whole position in order, if necessary, to encourage officers and burghers still further. . . . With the help of the Lord, I expect that if only the spirit of the burghers keeps up as it did to-day, the enemy will suffer a great reverse."

Another sign of Botha's returning confidence is that he telegraphed to Joubert next morning dissenting strongly from the latter's suggestion that the wagons and laagers should be kept for safety behind the Klip River, and urging that the essential thing was to keep all the burghers in the trenches, and give them no excuse for being away for hours at a time on the plea of fetching something from the laager. In the same telegram he also scouted the notion that there was any danger of the British attempting to cross near Monte Cristo.

Feb. 22. Crossing continued. Buller sanctions attack on Wynne Hills to cover the advance.

On the other hand, the rough handling of the Somersets does not appear in the least to have opened Buller's eyes to the real situation, or to have affected his plans. All night long, infantry, guns and transport poured across the bridge. By daylight on the 22nd Buller had 11 battalions and some 40 guns, with other impedimenta, crowded together in the low-lying and confined space behind the Colenso Kopjes; four more battalions, two of Norcott's and two of Hart's,* and quantities more baggage were squeezed in during the morning. The day's proceedings opened with

* Viz., Scottish Rifles and 60th, and Inniskilling and Dublin Fusiliers; the Connaught Rangers had been ferried over to the Colenso Kopjes during the afternoon of the 21st.

the customary bombardment of the country side, which was kept up with vigour all the morning by all the guns, including the 6-inch and 4·7 guns on the rise in front of Chieveley, though without any appreciable effect on the invisible Boer riflemen or upon the Boer guns, which continued, from their concealed positions on the heights, to direct a plunging fire on the British troops. It was becoming increasingly evident that the Boers were still there, and intended to oppose Buller's advance. Buller, indeed, realized as much, and signalled to White that morning that he had been "premature in fixing the actual date of entry into Ladysmith," as he was meeting with more opposition than he expected, but that he was "progressing." That the enemy's opposition necessitated a complete alteration in the tactical method of his progression does not seem to have occurred to him. He rejected the suggestion of an attack upon Grobelaar's Hill. But, though still intent on simply marching along the river bank, he realized that it was at any rate necessary to cover the immediate flank of the march. Between the Onderbroek and the Langverwacht, the higher ground came down to within 400 yards of the river at the point where it bends away sharply towards the Falls. Warren suggested that he should attack and occupy the kopje nearest the river with a brigade, and Buller agreed. Warren entrusted the task to Wynne, who ventured to point out, though without effect, that unless Grobelaar's was first seized, his brigade would be subject, both during the attack and still more afterwards, to enfilading fire from higher ground on both flanks. And, in truth, this plan of pushing a brigade into the middle of the enemy's positions and leaving it there to be shot at—embodying, as it did, a complete reversion to the disastrous tactics of Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, and a total obliviousness to the unmistakable lessons of Monte Cristo—could hardly have been much worse.

Wynne's advance.

At 2 P.M. Wynne advanced from the kopjes south of the Onderbroek Spruit, the South Lancashires on his right, the Royal Lancasters on his left, and the Composite Rifle Battalion in reserve. The 60th and Scottish Rifles were

advanced by Lyttelton to cover the flank of the movement. The rising ground between the Onderbroek and Langverwacht, known afterwards as the Wynne Hills, was an irregular plateau, broken up into a confusion of minor knolls and ridges like the wavelets on the crest of a lumpy sea. Rising only some 200 feet above the river, it was completely dominated, at rifle range, by the higher ground on every side. Its length from west to east was a little over a mile; its breadth, at the summit, from 300 yards to half a mile. Two well-marked gullies divided the summit roughly into three parts. Seen from the south, the western part appeared an entirely distinct hill from the central and eastern. It was only the two latter, known as Wynne Hill and Wynne Hill East, or Green Hill, that Wynne was ordered to occupy, and it was on them that he directed his battalions. He was under the impression, indeed, that Lyttelton had agreed to cover his flank by occupying Wynne Hill West. But when the advance had got some way across the Onderbroek, and no sign could be seen of troops advancing on the western hill, Wynne realized that there had been some misunderstanding. He promptly diverted the Rifle Battalion to the left, a move which probably saved his brigade from very unpleasant, if not disastrous, consequences. A few minutes later he was severely wounded, and for a second time Colonel Crofton, of the Royal Lancasters, succeeded to the command.

Wynne Hills occupied. Insecurity of position.

Under a terrific volume of fire the three battalions, now abreast, toiled up the lower slopes, the Boers falling back from the crest before them. But, as usual, the real Boer defence lay behind, a line of sangars running along the northern edge of the western and central portions of the plateau and diagonally across the eastern. Topping the crest, the British met a staggering fire, which promptly drove them to take cover below it. Only on the central hill did the right hand companies of the Royal Lancasters manage to advance a little way on to the plateau along a bush-covered ridge. Here they suffered severely, losing most of their officers, in the next few hours, including Major Yeatherd, who had just taken over the command from Crofton.

But the rest of the force, clinging to the reverse slopes, were not much better off. They were sheltered from the sangars in front. But there was hardly a spot on the slope that was not exposed to long-range fire from the cloud of keen-eyed marksmen scattered over the surrounding heights and in the bed of the Onderbroek and Langverwacht. A further extension of the flanks would only have exposed the brigade still more to enfilade or reverse fire; the Rifle battalion on the left was in fact unable to hold more than the eastern face of its hill, while on the right the flank of the South Lancashires was drawn back so as to rest on the river. A more insecure and useless position it would be difficult to imagine, and there is no reason for surprise that, as the hours wore on, without any signs of an improvement, the men began to get shaken. Towards dusk the Ermelo men on the central hill increased their fire and began cautiously pushing forward. The advanced companies of the Royal Lancasters were unable to hold their own, and suddenly ran back to the crest-line. This started a general wavering of the men under the crest. Up jumped a number of men and poured down the hillside in confusion. For a moment it seemed as if the whole force was going to be driven off the hill. But the Boers were slow to seize their opportunity. The troops were speedily rallied, and the front once more made intact. The question was, would it remain so for long? Night was fast coming on, ammunition was running short, and the Boers were steadily creeping forward.

Arrival of 60th Rifles. Cathcart's charge.

At 6 P.M. Crofton had sent back an urgent request for reinforcements. The first to receive it was Bewicke-Copley of the 60th Rifles, who at once sent forward four companies. With the last glimmer of daylight these reached the centre of the position, a little to the right of the nek between the western and central hills. At this part of the crest there was a gap in the firing-line, or else it was held so thinly that the 60th, in the darkness, did not discover the fact. All they knew, from the sound of the bullets and the sparkle of the rifles, was that the Boers were close up to them, and, concluding that the enemy had broken through the line, they decided to drive them back. With a ringing cheer they

charged up to the crest. Captain the Hon. R. Cathcart, with the leading company, rushed over the crest and across the plateau, right on top of the advancing Boers. Up sprang the Boers and fled back across the plateau, with the Riflemen hot on their heels. But the Boers in the further sangars saw what was happening, and received them with a terrific fire. Losing heavily, Cathcart tried to get his men together and withdraw. But he had got right into the middle of the Boers, who began firing into his little band from every side. Cathcart was killed; his subaltern collected the survivors in a little stone sheep kraal within 70 yards of the Boer sangars. The other companies, meanwhile, ignorant of what was happening in front of them, took up positions on the crest-line.

Arrival of E. Surreys. The night on Wynne Hill.

Meanwhile Crofton's demand for reinforcements had reached Hildyard, whose brigade was lying by the railway, half a mile in rear of Onderbroek Spruit. He ordered forward the East Surreys to support the left, and the Devons to support the right. Groping their way forward to the sound of the firing, the East Surreys eventually reached the nek between the western and central hills. In the darkness and confusion no one in authority could be found, so Colonel Harris had to make what dispositions he could. Ordering Major Pearse, with three companies, to reinforce Wynne Hill West, and leaving a company at the nek, he took the remaining four companies to the right. In the intense darkness two of the companies got lost, and eventually struck the crest of Wynne Hill at its extreme eastern end, where they found Crofton, who put them in reserve under the crest. Harris himself reached the crest a little further to the left. Here he found a great deal of confusion, but, reforming such men as he could get hold of, he took up a position with them and his own two companies, and, as it was impossible to find out if there were any troops in front or not, ordered them to lie down with fixed bayonets. Later on, when the firing subsided, he set them to work building sangars. For some hours, however, heavy firing went on all along the Wynne Hill, the Boers creeping up quite close and being more than once driven back by rushes with the bayonet. A more trying night for troops it would be hard to picture.

The night on Wynne Hill W. Devons reinforce Wynne Hill E.

On Wynne Hill West, likewise, heavy fighting went on for some hours after nightfall. The Middelburgers made a series of most determined attempts to dislodge the Rifle battalion, and here also the British at one time had to clear their front with a bayonet charge. But, though hard pressed, the reservists held their own with admirable determination, and showed that they had unlearnt nothing of their soldierly spirit. The East Surreys now reinforced them all along the crest, and also prolonged their western flank, intrenching themselves as well as they could. Hearing from the Rifles that this flank was completely enfiladed by two small kopjes across the Onderbroek, Pearse asked Hildyard to occupy them. Hildyard sent forward some companies of the Queen's, who seized the kopjes and intrenched themselves during the night. The Devons, meanwhile—or half of them, for, in spite of the precaution of moving in single file, each man holding on to the coat of the man in front, several companies had gone astray—reached the South Lancashire positions on the slope of Wynne Hill East. This section of the line had not been so hard pressed as the centre, and the Devons were kept in reserve at the foot of the hill, where their missing companies joined them in the morning.

Buller's orders for continuing the advance.

On the evening of the 22nd Buller, who had now transferred his headquarters to the left bank, issued his orders for a general advance next morning. The whole force was to "march along the west of the Colenso–Ladysmith line," Lyttelton's division on the left, and Warren's on the right. The divisions were apparently intended to march in column of brigades, the artillery with their brigades, "one battery when possible following the first battalion of leading brigades, and two batteries between brigades." Only first line transport was to accompany the troops, who were to carry one day's rations. The heavy baggage was to come on when sent for. Coke's brigade was to remain behind to "garrison Colenso and protect the rear of the advance." Its place in the Fifth Division was to be taken by the three battalions of Hart's brigade now in Colenso. All the rest of the force still on the right bank—Norcott's remaining two battalions, the heavy artillery, and the two cavalry brigades—were to cross

over the pontoon during the night or early in the morning. The rear was to be brought up by the 6th Brigade, which was, however, to leave a battalion, supported by the mountain battery and four naval 12-pounders, on the north end of the Hlangwane ridge "to keep the right of the advance clear of snipers." These are orders for a march, and for nothing more. Of the tactical features of the ground, of the enemy, not a word, beyond a single reference to "snipers." Considering when and where these orders were issued—at the end of the most trying and uncertain day's fighting since Spion Kop, and with the army squeezed in between the enemy's intrenched positions and an unfordable stretch of the river—they are almost too bewildering for criticism. One thing is clear. Whether they were issued in the belief that the Boers were actually withdrawing, and that the march would not be seriously opposed, or whether Buller only meant to march up his whole force as far as the cover of the Wynne Hills allowed and then await further developments, the only conclusion that can be drawn from them is that the British commander was still firmly wedded to his idea of moving along the road, and was, even now, unable or unwilling to see that the Boers meant to stay, and that it would require a real tactical operation to dislodge them.

Feb. 23. The morning on the Wynne Hills.

The morning of the 23rd certainly furnished no indications of a Boer withdrawal. The firing on the Wynne Hills, which had not died down till long after midnight, reopened with full vigour at the first glimmer of dawn. The actual occasion of it was an attempt to rescue the company of the 60th in the sheep-kraal in front of the Boer sangars. Lieutenant Wake had crawled out and made his way through the Boers on the plateau to the crest, where he found Crofton and informed him of what had taken place. Crofton had sent Wake back with orders for the company to hold on till dawn, when he would send a force forward to cover its withdrawal, and had deputed for the task the two companies of East Surreys who had gone astray from Harris earlier in the night. These now moved forward across the plateau till they were nearly level with the kraal, and lay down in open order while the Riflemen slipped out as quietly

as they could. At last several coming out together made a noise. A burst of firing came from the sangars and was taken up all along the line. Fortunately it was still nearly dark, or not many would have escaped. As it was, the losses were heavy; among the wounded was Major Smith, who led the covering party. The tremendous burst of fire proved too much for the overstrained nerves of some of the men, and there was a sudden panic in the advanced sangars on Wynne Hill and Wynne Hill East. But the men were promptly rallied; two companies of the Devons instantly pushing forward to the sangars when they realized what was happening. As the light grew stronger Harris moved forward a company of East Surreys towards the bush-grown eastern ridge of Wynne Hill. Here it came under a tremendous fire. Harris was wounded in several places; Lieutenant Hinton killed. But the company hung on doggedly in such scanty cover as the long grass afforded and kept up a heavy fire all day. In the course of the morning the command of the 11th Brigade was assigned to Colonel Kitchener of the West Yorks, an excellent choice soon to be justified by the results. For the rest of the day the troops hung on under heavy shell and rifle-fire, and were relieved in the evening by Hildyard's fresh battalions on the central and eastern hills and by the Royal Fusiliers and Welsh Fusiliers from Barton's brigade on Wynne Hill West. The total casualties for the two days were over 500 killed and wounded.

Buller decides to attack Inniskilling Hill.

It was evident from the first, on the morning of the 23rd, that any such advance as that indicated by the previous night's orders was out of the question. The troops, indeed, continued to cross. But Buller decided to defer the actual advance, and meanwhile, following up the principle of the previous day's operation, to send a brigade forward under cover of the Wynne Hills to seize the high sloping-topped hill just beyond, known subsequently as Inniskilling Hill.* The capture of this hill would, he hoped, ease the pressure on the flank of the Wynne Hills, and perhaps make it possible to drive the Boers off them altogether. Anyhow, it would enable the force to squeeze its way under cover at

* Also known as Hart's Hill, or Terrace Hill.

least a mile beyond the Langverwacht. What Buller intended to do after that we can only conjecture. Perhaps he may have hoped simply to repeat the same tactics with the next two hills in succession and thus eventually emerge on to the Pieter's plain. What would actually have happened if the attack on the hill had succeeded is quite clear. The Boers would promptly have turned their whole attention on the captors and attempted to drive them off again. Judging by the experience of Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, Buller would thereupon have relapsed into an attitude of passive defence. But as a position for passive defence, the summit of Inniskilling Hill was probably even worse than any of those on which Buller had yet exposed his men. It would have been under enveloping rifle-fire from Railway Hill round to the bed of the Langverwacht, and under shell-fire over the whole semicircle from Grobelaar's to Pieter's. Reinforcement or retreat would be equally difficult as long as the Boers held the bed of the Langverwacht. The only question is whether the hill would have been evacuated after two or three days' fighting, or whether the troops would have been driven off by sheer force; whether it would have been a Vaal Krantz, or a Majuba.

The advance to Hart's Hollow.

Buller entrusted the attack to Hart, strengthening his brigade by the addition of two of Norcott's battalions.* The guns had been shelling the trenches on Inniskilling Hill from time to time ever since the 19th, a proceeding which no doubt only encouraged the Krugersdorpers to improve them. They now concentrated their full attention upon the hill, the long-range guns from their low-lying positions near the pontoon, while the 7th Battery was sent back over the river to join the 19th and 63rd and the four naval 12-pounders at the north end of the Hlangwane ridge, and on the plateau to the east of it. Hart moved off about 12.30 P.M. as ordered. In spite of the occupation of the Wynne Hills, the Boers still managed to keep up a pretty

* Durham L.I. and Rifle Brigade. Hart's brigade now consisted of Inniskilling Fusiliers, Connaught Rangers, Dublin Fusiliers, and a half battalion Imperial Light Infantry (attached in place of the Border Regiment left at Chieveley).

accurate long-range fire upon the ground in rear of them, and, to avoid this, Hart moved his men along under the river bank. But, as the bank was muddy and the men were forced to move in single file, this considerably delayed the advance, which was already very late in starting. The mouth of the Langverwacht was too deep to wade across, and the troops had to get on to the bank and cross by the little railway bridge. The Boers were in force higher up the Langverwacht valley, and, the moment the head of the column appeared on the bridge, opened a heavy rifle and pom-pom fire on it. The men crossed over in single rushes, but, even so, many were hit. A more serious matter than the casualties was the further delay involved. After the bridge, henceforth known as Pom-pom Bridge, the column took to the bank again. This, at first, however, afforded little cover, and several men were killed, and lay there for the rest of the brigade to step over, their feet imbedded in the mud and their heads in the river. The whole of this unpleasant and extremely slow advance might have been avoided by crossing the pontoon, marching along the right bank, and recrossing by the Boer bridge, of whose partial repair Hart was, no doubt, entirely unaware. At the Boer bridge the leading company inclined to the left and began crossing on to the broken and bushy ground, about a mile in width, which sloped up from the Tugela to the foot of Inniskilling Hill. This ground had been cleared of Boers by the artillery and by the fire of the Scots Fusiliers on the opposite bank, and the leading battalions were formed up here as they arrived. The Inniskillings were in front in two lines, the Connaught Rangers and I.L.I. behind. The right of the line rested on a shallow depression which ran from the Tugela, a little way below the Falls, towards the re-entrant between Inniskilling Hill and Railway Hill to the north-east of it. This depression, known afterwards as Hart's Hollow, was intersected by a donga, full of hummocks and bushes, and afforded good cover.

Hart orders the attack.

It was now nearly 5 P.M. The Dublin Fusiliers were only just arriving and the two 4th Brigade battalions were still a long way in rear. By the time they arrived it would

be night. If the attack was to be carried out at all that afternoon it would have to be begun at once with the troops already on the ground. This might prove a risky undertaking; on the other hand, it seemed even riskier to spend the night in Hart's Hollow surrounded by the enemy, who were already keeping up a heavy fire upon Hart's battalions from every quarter. Hart decided to attack. The Inniskillings were to advance on the left and attack the southern face of the hill, the Connaughts on the right to attack the south-eastern corner. The I.L.I. were to cross Hart's Hollow and advance towards Railway Hill in order to cover the attack from flank fire. Off went the Irish battalions, the impetuous Hart repeatedly making his bugler sound the "double" and the "charge" to hurry them on. After pushing on for half a mile in the teeth of a heavy converging fire they reached the railway, which runs close under the foot of the hill, passing through a deep cutting between the hill and a small kopje just to the left of the hollow, and over a culvert near the head of the hollow. For a moment they paused, and Hart at once ordered Cooper of the Dublins to hurry forward half a battalion to "give a fillip" to the final attack. He at the same time suggested that Cooper himself should, with the other half, attempt to take Railway Hill. But the hill was two miles away and the task in itself quite beyond the powers of so small a force, and, deferring to Cooper's advice, he abandoned the idea.

The Inniskillings gain the first crest.

Meanwhile the leading battalions were up and over the line, breaking through the barbed wire fence, scrambling down and up the cutting, through another fence, and then up the side of the hill. Immediately from every quarter, from Wynne Hill East and the bushy Langverwacht valley, from the line of sangars on the crest of the hill, from the re-entrant to the right and from Railway Hill, the Boers poured in a devastating fire, which the efforts of the British gunners were quite powerless to keep down. So heavy was the enfilading fire on the right flank that Colonel Brooke of the Connaughts now sent four of his companies through the culvert towards the re-entrant. But neither they nor the I.L.I., who now came up beyond them, were able to

effect much. The Inniskillings, who crossed at the left of the cutting and by a level crossing just beyond, were the first at the foot of the hill, and went up the steep face with a rush that nothing could check. At their approach the Boers melted away from the forward crest. Exultingly the men flung themselves over the low parapet into the trench—only to find before them 300 yards of loose boulders, interspersed with scanty thorn-trees, sloping up towards the main Boer position in front of them, and towards a similar position on their left. The second line now came up into the first, and at the same moment Lieutenant-Colonel Sitwell, who had raced up with the leading company of the Dublins, found Colonel Thackeray and conveyed to him Hart's order that the hill was to be taken before sunset at all costs.

The two charges across the slope.

Thackeray at once led his men up the slope. But the attack simply withered away before the appalling magazine fire opened upon it. Thackeray was killed, Major Davidson and other officers wounded, and the line ran back and threw itself down behind the parapet. By now the Connaughts were on the crest to the right of the Inniskillings, and the rest of the Dublins had come up on the left. After a brief colloquy, Sitwell and the other officers on the crest decided, in view of Hart's orders, that the attempt must be renewed. In the waning evening light the Irish regiments leapt over the parapet and rushed desperately forward across the slope. It was the supreme moment which the Boers knew was coming, and for which they had husbanded themselves. From every crack and cranny along the flanks of the hill and from the unbroken trench in front the rifles crashed and roared. The gunners across the river strained their eyes in vain. It was already too dark to distinguish friend and foe, and they dared not keep up their fire. Officers and men fell at every step as they rushed steadily onward. Major Sanders, the surviving field officer of the Inniskillings, was killed, and the command fell to Captain Jones. Half-way across the plateau it became beyond the power of human endurance. Those who could turned and ran for the crest, the Boers leaping to their feet and emptying their magazines after them. Those who had got furthest forward threw

themselves on the ground and waited till merciful night closed over them.

Losses in the attack. Troops hang on for the night.

It was a magnificent attack, displaying all the finest qualities of the brave Irish regiments that took part in it. That its object was a futile one, that its failure was probably even an advantage in the end, adds a regret to losses that would have been cheap if expended for a better purpose, with the stern, yet prudent, lavishness of true generalship. The total casualties in the actual attack on the hill amounted to about 450, or fully 30 per cent. of the companies engaged. Of these the Inniskillings, who lost three officers killed and nine wounded, suffered more than half. The Boer losses were, naturally, much less—perhaps 50 or 60 out of the 400–500 men actually on the hill, and another 20 or 30 casualties in the other commandos. But the Krugersdorpers were undoubtedly severely shaken by the tremendous fire of the heavy guns on their narrow hill-top, by the impetuosity of the British attack, and by the loss of their commandant, F. Potgieter, who had been Botha's right-hand man during the last few days. After dark Brooke and Sitwell rallied some 500–600 men and set them to work, under a steady fire, building a large curved wall half way down the slope. Brooke also succeeded in getting in touch with his detached companies. These had penetrated a considerable way up the re-entrant, together with the I.L.I., and had fallen back on the railway at dusk, the irregulars in some confusion after the wounding of their commander, Major Hay. Leaving three companies of the Connaughts to guard his right rear, he placed the fourth directly in rear, and a company of I.L.I. to guard the left. These last seem to have been seized by a panic later in the night and to have disappeared. At midnight came the first news from Hart, an order to hold on till dawn, when a battalion and a half would be sent to reinforce. The rest of the night was spent clinging to the steep slope—long anxious hours disturbed by constant sniping and by the cries and moans of the wounded.

Feb. 24. Brooke's force falls back from the hill.

Dawn found Brooke's decimated force in a precarious situation, of which the Boers were not slow to take advantage. The sniping at once began to increase, and the snipers,

advancing round the western end of the hill and down the Langverwacht, began to pour a deadly reverse fire into the troops behind the wall. It was then that the disappearance of the company of I.L.I. was discovered. Just after dawn Major McGrigor, Hart's brigade-major, had come up the hill and informed Brooke that reinforcements would come shortly. But before they had come the fire had grown so deadly that Brooke and Sitwell decided to fall back to the railway. This was done at 8 A.M. with the loss of some lives, including that of the gallant Sitwell. A company of the Inniskillings on the left was not informed of the retirement, and remained on the slope for more than an hour longer. Meanwhile the Durham L.I. had come up to reinforce, and were immediately ordered to reoccupy the wall by Hart, who considered that its occupation would keep the Boers away from the lower crest, from which they might otherwise direct a plunging fire into Hart's Hollow. At the same time the flanking fire which had caused the retirement was kept down by several maxims posted on the kopje to the left of the hollow. Before this, in answer to a request sent during the night, Hart had been reinforced by the East Surreys, half the West Yorks, and half the Scottish Rifles.

A renewed attack ordered and postponed.

All the morning of the 24th desultory shell and rifle fire continued along the whole line, the Boers bringing into action two or three more guns sent round from the Upper Tugela positions, where a certain number of burghers were still quite uselessly sitting. Even Buller had now realized that the Boers meant to stand, and that a mere march under cover of flanking detachments was out of the question. But he had not yet evolved any new plan to meet the altered situation, and early in the afternoon determined to repeat the attack on Inniskilling Hill. He, however, improved upon the previous day's plan to the extent of suggesting to Warren, whom he despatched to Hart's Hollow to undertake the general direction of the attack, that Hart should make use of some of the additional battalions now with him in order to direct a simultaneous attack on Railway Hill. Arriving at Hart's Hollow, Warren arranged with Hart that the latter with two battalions should attack Railway Hill, while Cooper of the Dublins

MAJOR-GENERAL A. FITZROY HART, C.B., C.M.G.

COMMANDING 5TH INFANTRY BRIGADE.

Photo by Lafayette, Dublin.

MAJOR-GENERAL A. S. WYNNE, C.B.

COMMANDING 11TH BRIGADE.

Photo by Duffus Bros., Cape Town.

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should lead the rest in a fresh attack upon Inniskilling Hill. By the time the necessary arrangements were made it was nearly 4 P.M., and Hart, with the previous day's experience before him, suggested that the attack had better be postponed till the morning. Buller's assent was obtained to this postponement, and after dark a further message arrived from Buller not to attack till further orders, as he wished to place artillery on Monte Cristo to support the operation.

Standstill of the operations. Confusion of units.

The truth is that Buller's operations had come to a complete standstill. It was impossible to continue them on the present lines without serious prospect of disaster. His force had been frittered away since the 21st in a series of unsuccessful attacks, which had cost over 1,300 men, with practically no results to show for this expenditure. It was now strung out along the river in a chain of thoroughly insecure positions, liable to be cut off from each other, difficult to reinforce, and still more difficult to escape from in case of a reverse. Except that it was even more unsatisfactory, the position closely resembled that of Warren's force on January 23. Here again, as at Tabanyama, all the units had become hopelessly mixed up, while most of the artillery and mounted troops were in positions where they could be least effective. To judge of the extent to which divisions and brigades had been broken up, it is only necessary to consider the dispositions on the night of the 24th. In Hart's Hollow were parts of three different brigades, namely, three and a half battalions of Hart's, two and a half of Norcott's (Durham L.I., Rifle Brigade, and half Scottish Rifles), and one and a half of Hildyard's (7 companies East Surreys, 5 companies West Yorks), the whole under Hart. On the Wynne Hills and along the line of the Onderbroek Spruit were the remnants of Hildyard's and Norcott's brigades, together with two battalions of Barton's (Royal Fusiliers and Welsh Fusiliers) and one of Kitchener's (Composite Rifles), the whole under Lyttelton. Further in rear, from the Onderbroek to the Colenso Kopjes, were Buller's and Warren's headquarters, the whole of the Fifth Division except the Composite Rifles, Barton with one battalion (Irish Fusiliers), and Dundonald's cavalry brigade. On the right bank, from

Hlangwane to the Falls, was one battalion of Barton's (Scots Fusiliers) and a squadron of 13th Hussars. In Colenso was Burn-Murdoch's cavalry brigade. Of the guns the 61st and 64th Batteries were with Lyttelton; the 28th, 73rd, and 78th, two 4·7 and four 12-pounder naval guns and four five-inch garrison guns with Buller; the 7th, 19th, and 63rd Batteries, the 4th Mountain Battery, "A" R.H.A., and four naval 12-pounders on the right bank.

Danger of position. Panic on night of 24th.

If ever a force had exposed itself to an absolutely disastrous counter-attack it was Buller's army on the 23rd and 24th. Had the Boers possessed but a tithe of the initiative and enterprise they were to show in the later stages of the war, they now had an unequalled opportunity for paralysing the British advance, perhaps even for breaking up the whole British force. The most obvious form this counter-attack might have taken would have been an attempt to cut off and destroy the battalions in Hart's Hollow. How disastrous such an attack might have proved was shown on the night of the 24th, when the Boers on Inniskilling Hill suddenly poured a heavy fire down upon the regiments bivouacked in Hart's Hollow, while at the same time a certain number of snipers worked round the flanks. Though the Durhams under the hill and the flanking outposts on the railway were unaffected, a regular panic set in among some of the troops in rear. A number of men stampeded towards the river. Others began firing wildly in every direction. Eventually the Rifle Brigade and East Surreys were pushed out on the flanks, and the West Yorks sent to guard the Boer bridge, while order was by degrees restored in the bivouac itself.

Opportunity for Boer counter-stroke.

But the Boers might have aimed at even greater results, in view of the extraordinary position of the British force. Except for the weak detachments on the ridge north of Hlangwane, the whole of Buller's army was cooped together between the river and the Boers at the bottom of the Colenso basin. But, though across the river, Buller had no effective command of the river bank, except in the immediate neighbourhood of his force, and the Boers could have crossed at any point above Colenso or below the Falls. A crossing at

dusk, followed by a night attack on Hlangwane under cover of a vigorous demonstration against Buller's whole front, was not impossible. It would have required consummate audacity: yet not greater audacity than French's ride to Kameelfontein. The results of success would have been infinitely greater. The confusion at daylight in the acres of closely packed wagons, artillery and troops would have been indescribable. The recapture of Hlangwane in the teeth of a converging fire from several hundred rifles directed upon the narrow pontoon bridge, with the Boers pressing in from the rear and shelling from all the heights, might well have proved impossible. All that would then have remained would have been for the troops south of the Onderbroek to fall back on the Colenso Kopjes and make their way across the drifts at Colenso, abandoning most of the guns and baggage, and leaving the rest of the force to its fate. Apart from such a crowning disaster the mere appearance of the Boers on the right bank in any strength would have forced Buller to extricate his troops and abandon the attempt to squeeze his way through the Boer positions.

Buller begins to realize necessity of a new plan. Decides to shift pontoon bridge.

But Buller himself was already beginning to realize the impossibility of the situation in which he had lodged his force, and gradually to grope his way towards better dispositions and towards a real policy of attack. His plan for attacking Railway Hill and Inniskilling Hill together on the 24th was the first sign of a recognition, however inadequate, of the necessity of attacking on a broader front and with a larger proportion of his force. With the second postponement of that attack in order to bring guns round on to the opposite bank, and on to the underfeatures of Monte Cristo, the last vestige of the march in the presence of a rearguard or of snipers disappears, and we begin to arrive at a genuine tactical scheme. With this new plan in his mind Buller began to think of shifting the pontoon bridge from its position under Hlangwane to the rear of Hart's Hollow to support the new attack. This was undoubtedly the place where it should have been thrown from the first. The river below the Falls was deep and quiet; the ravine in which it ran would cover the bridging operations from observation and attack; a path

leading down from the pleateau could, without difficulty, be improved sufficiently to enable the pontoon sections to get down. At the same time, in the existing situation, the transference of the bridge was purely superfluous; it was in no sense an essential feature of the new plan of attack. Such of the troops as were not already in position for the attack might have moved down the left bank or have crossed by the Boer bridge, which could, if necessary, have been repaired sufficiently to allow of the passage of field artillery. The heavy guns and baggage could not move in any case till the tactical issue was decided, and then they might have gone one way just as well as the other. But in Buller, as in Warren, the instinct to cling close to the wagons—an instinct begotten of small expeditions in savage countries—was too strong to be resisted. That evening not only the bulk of the artillery, but also the baggage of the Fifth Division, received orders to recross the river, and Major Irvine was instructed to set the engineers to work next day improving the road and generally getting everything ready for the change.

Feb. 25. Partial armistice. Redistribution of commands.

All this while a number of the wounded from the unsuccessful attacks across the Wynne Hill plateau and across the sloping top of Inniskilling Hill had been lying out between the opposing lines, suffering unspeakable agonies from their wounds, from heat and thirst, and from the stench of the dead with whom they lay intermingled Attempts made by either side to succour them had invariably drawn a heavy fire. Some arrangement for a temporary suspension of the firing was desirable, and at daybreak on Sunday 25th Buller sent an officer with a request for an armistice. After some parleying Botha and Meyer agreed not to fire upon stretcher-parties, an arrangement all the more convenient to Buller, as it involved no restriction on the movement of troops. So while the stretcher-parties on both sides performed their melancholy task, and the men of both armies were fraternizing on neutral ground—exchanging tobacco, or views on the causes and progress of the war—Buller went on with his preparations. This morning also the fighting-line on the left bank was definitely divided into two commands

divided by the Langverwacht. Warren, with headquarters in Hart's Hollow, commanded all troops east of it, facing Lukas Meyer; Lyttelton, facing Botha, commanded all west and south of it, except the 10th Brigade, which guarded Colenso. Buller's own headquarters were once more transferred to the right bank, near the northern edge of the plateau.

Sundry movements on Feb. 24–25.

For a moment, however, Buller was diverted from the consideration of his own attack by rumours of Boer movements round his flanks, rumours which may possibly have contributed to his eagerness to extricate his force from its present position. Burn-Murdoch's brigade, with the horse battery, was moved to Hussar Hill, Dundonald to Cingolo Nek, a squadron 13th Hussars as far as Weenen, while Barton with the Irish Fusiliers was brought back over the river. On the previous day already the S.A.L.H. had been detached by Dundonald and sent to the Little Tugela on a report of Boer raiders on the left flank. Bethune, it may here be mentioned in passing, had reconnoitred the Boer positions between the Tugela Ferry and Helpmakaar on the 24th, and, finding them strongly held, had fallen back again. Colonel Morris's force, too, on the same date reoccupied the Nkandhla magistracy.

Feb. 25–26. Preparations for the attack.

Finding Buller now anxious to extricate himself from the bottom of the Colenso amphitheatre, some of his staff again urged upon him the advantages of a wide turning movement to the east. The idea seems to have been at least considered, but eventually Buller decided to reject it. To have done so now would have required a complete withdrawal of the force on the left bank, and an abandonment of the footing already gained, and no doubt Buller decided rightly under the circumstances. But his own plan was, during this and the next day, being gradually modified and improved. By degrees Buller was persuaded not only to concentrate every available man and gun for the attack, including even the troops at Chieveley, but also to enlarge the front on which he would operate, so as to embrace Pieter's Hill, east of the railway, as well as Inniskilling and Railway Hills. All day during the 25th and during the following night the guns were moved back across

the river and on to the high edge of the plateau facing the Inniskilling and Railway Hills. By the morning of the 26th 76 guns* were in position, 70 along the mile-and-a-half downstream of the Falls, as far as the high ground extended, and two guns of the 4th Mountain Battery and 4 naval 12-pounders on the Clump Hill spur of Monte Cristo. Only one battery was left with Lyttelton on the left bank. Throughout the 26th a slow bombardment was kept up, chiefly with the object of taking ranges. During the day the Borders were brought up from Chieveley, and the York and Lancasters ordered to follow early next morning, their place being taken by Burn-Murdoch. Dundonald, too, was brought in from Cingolo Nek, to the northern edge of the plateau. In the evening the 11th Brigade was brought across to the right bank. After dark the work of dismantling the pontoon bridge was begun. By 2.30 A.M. the whole bridge was packed on wagons; it was then moved as far as the northern end of Hlangwane, but was unable to proceed further in the dark.

The scheme of attack.

On the 26th Buller, Warren, and some of the staff rode together along the whole length of the right bank as far as Monte Cristo. It was during this reconnaissance that the plan received its final definite shape, largely, it would seem, under Warren's influence. At 5 P.M. that afternoon Buller assembled his senior officers and explained the scheme of attack for the morrow. Covered by the artillery, the pontoon bridge was to be thrown as early as possible. The attack itself was to be carried out by three brigades—Barton's, Kitchener's, and Norcott's—which were to attack Pieter's, Railway and Inniskilling Hills respectively. The attack was to be in echelon. Barton was to cross the river first, move down in file under the steep bank for about two miles till extended opposite Pieter's, and then turn sharp to the left, ascend the heights, and attack Pieter's Hill across the open. Kitchener was to follow and deliver his assault on Railway Hill as soon as Barton's attack made itself felt. Norcott, who had the shortest distance to cover, was not to

* Viz., 4 naval 4·7 guns, including two platforms brought from Chieveley, 8 naval 12-pdrs., 4 5-inch guns R.G.A., 61st howitzers, 4th M.B., "A" R.H.A., and 7th, 19th, 28th, 63rd, 64th and 78th R.F.A.

begin till Kitchener was already on the slopes of Railway Hill. The composition of these brigades was, owing to recent events, somewhat arbitrary. Barton only had the Scots and Irish Fusiliers, but was to borrow the Dublin Fusiliers from Hart's brigade, picking them up after crossing. Kitchener similarly was to pick up the five companies of his old battalion, the West Yorks; the York and Lancasters also were to rejoin the 11th Brigade, displacing the Composite Rifles. Norcott was to borrow the East Surreys to make up for the 60th and half the Scottish Rifles still with Lyttelton. Warren was to have the general direction of Kitchener's and Norcott's attacks. The whole artillery was under Colonel Parsons, and the gunners were specially warned to follow the infantry attacks up closely, and not be too afraid of hitting their own men; if in doubt, they were to shoot just over the enemy's trenches and thus keep up the impression of sustained shelling. Besides artillery support the attack was to be supported by the fire of the Composite Rifles, Borders, Dundonald's brigade, and the maxims of the attacking battalions on the right bank, and of Hart's men in rear of Norcott. On the left Lyttelton and Coke were to keep in touch with the Boer right all along their front. The plan was really nothing more than a simple frontal attack upon a position strongly intrenched, at any rate as regards Inniskilling and Railway Hills, the only complication in it being the nature of the initial deployment. But it was an attack developed over a front of fully three miles, carried out by a considerable force of infantry, and supported by an overwhelming artillery placed in commanding tactical positions. It was quite good enough to succeed. Indeed, from first to last throughout these operations in Natal Buller had only to give his army its head, and a sufficient front to move on, and he was practically certain to break through almost anywhere.

Boer exhaustion. Uncertainty as to Buller's intentions.

In that respect the prospects were now better than at any previous time, except, perhaps, on the eve of Spion Kop. In point of numbers available Botha and Meyer were still fairly strong. Their weakness lay in the moral condition of the burghers. It was only with the greatest difficulty that

the commandants could keep the trenches manned, and induce the burghers to leave the laagers, where, on one pretext or another, they spent the greater part of their time, well away from the dangers and the nerve-shattering din of the battle. Thirteen days' continuous fighting was too much for the *moral* of undisciplined troops, however patriotic. A few days' rest was absolutely necessary to restore it. It was here that the Boer system failed; it was here that Buller with his magnificently imperturbable infantry possessed a reserve of strength which, in spite of all mistakes in leading, was sooner or later bound to assert itself. He had only to fight long enough without a break to be sure of victory. With the burghers in this condition an effective counter-stroke was out of the question, however tempting the opportunity held out, and however great the result that might follow upon success. Even the redistribution of positions was difficult; any change was feared by the commandants as likely to hasten a general retreat. Kaffirs had, indeed, brought rumours of preparations for crossing below the Falls, and Joubert urgently warned Botha to concentrate his attention on that part of the position. But, beyond bringing round a few small detachments from Ladysmith and from Botha's right to strengthen Railway Hill and Pieter's, nothing was done. Botha's chief anxiety during these days seems to have been to get the incapable Meyer out of the way and secure an undivided control. He had already suggested privately to Joubert that the Government might order Meyer off to Vryheid on some political pretext. This was done, but apparently Meyer did not pay any immediate attention to the order. With Meyer away, and with a short respite for his men before the fighting began again, Botha hoped that all would be well. That he would now secure this respite, that Buller was retiring after Wynne Hill and Inniskilling Hill, as he had retired after Spion Kop and Vaal Krantz, was a very natural inference from Buller's movements on the 25th and 26th. The massing of the artillery on the plateau opposite Hart's Hollow might, after all, be merely intended to cover the withdrawal of the troops in the hollow. Even if some fresh move was contemplated,

it was probable, judging by the former instances, that a few days at the very least would elapse before it was put into action. On the afternoon of the 26th, while Buller was completing his preparations for the attack, Botha was communicating his impression of those preparations to Joubert:

"It is quite possible that the enemy is retiring again. Their wagons and tents, as well as their big guns, have already recrossed the river. Their infantry are still in the trenches, though some of them have already left. It is evident that their losses were heavy. By to-morrow morning we shall know for certain what the enemy's intention really is."

Feb. 27. Construction of new bridge. 6th Brigade crosses and moves into position.

At dawn on the 27th Irvine started with his pontoons for the river, and at once set to work constructing the bridge, while the artillery opened a slow fire. Before 10 A.M. a bridge, 100 yards long, was completed, and Barton's two battalions began to cross. The confidence felt by the inner ring of senior and staff officers, that Buller had at last hit upon a rational plan of attack, had immediately communicated itself to the whole force, and it was with the full assurance of victory that the men stepped over the bridge, on which the engineers in a similar spirit had fixed a signpost marking the road "to Ladysmith." As they crossed, the tidings of Cronje's surrender was passed round, and in the true British spirit of emulation Buller's men resolved that Roberts should not be alone in enjoying the credit of making the day a decisive one in British history. Joined by the Dublins on the left bank, Barton's battalions turned to the right and moved along in single file at the foot of the steep slope, in places almost a cliff, with which the Pieter's plateau descends to the Tugela. The movement was seen by the Piet Retiefers on Eagle's Nest, and the gun behind them fired a few shells without doing any damage. Any other detection of or interference with their movements was prevented by the artillery, who kept the Boers in their trenches, and by the riflemen and maxims on the right bank, whose continuous fire effectively prevented any patrols or snipers working near enough to the river to see anything. Soon after noon Barton halted his brigade, now extended

below the whole length of the Pieter's plateau, turned them to the left and formed them up for the attack. The Scots Fusiliers were on the right, the Irish Fusiliers on the left, each with three companies in the firing-line; the Dublin Fusiliers were in support. Barton's orders were for the attack to be made as rapidly as possible in order to push home before the enemy recovered from their surprise. The leading companies of the Irish Fusiliers were to go straight up the hill and rush the nearest kopjes on the edge of the plateau facing Railway Hill. The rest of the line was to pivot round them so as to envelope the whole series of the Pieter's Hill kopjes, which extended northwards for nearly a mile. As a precaution against attack from the direction of Eagle's Nest, the Scots Fusiliers were to send two or three companies to the right.

Barton captures southern and central part of Pieter's Kopjes, but cannot get further.

At the end of a stiff climb of 400–500 feet the men found themselves on the edge of the stony Pieter's plateau. As they neared the top they became visible to the Boers on Railway Hill, who opened a brisk fire. But Barton gave them no time to change their dispositions, and a moment later the Irish Fusiliers raced across the plateau and captured the nearest kopjes without serious loss. Here they threw up rough defences, and opened a heavy fire on Railway Hill and upon the further kopjes of Pieter's Hill. The Scots Fusiliers had much further to go, and before their advance had developed, the Boers, whom the rush of the Irish Fusiliers had taken completely by surprise, had had time to reinforce the rest of the Pieter's kopjes. Moreover, as they crossed the plateau a heavy fire was opened on their right front and flank which caused their line to contract. Consequently, even after being reinforced by the companies guarding the right, now replaced by Dublin Fusiliers, they failed to envelop the largest and highest kopje at the northern end of the ridge. They pushed on, however, suffering some loss, including that of their commanding officer, Colonel Carr, wounded, drove out the Boers and seized the central part of the ridge, prolonging the line of the Irish Fusiliers for 600 yards or more (2.30 P.M.). Several Boer guns now directed their attention to the kopjes held by the British, and the Boers on the northern

kopje, strongly reinforced from the laagers in rear, opened a very heavy enfilading fire. Barton, who had been slightly wounded at the beginning of the action, decided that the kopje must be taken, and got together three companies of the Dublins and a company of Scots for the purpose. Guided by Captain McBean, his brigade-major, the little force worked to the right, but met with a terrific fire. After every officer but one had been hit the advance came to a stop in a donga within 300 yards of the kopje. During all these movements Barton had received but slight support from the artillery. The guns on the plateau opposite seem to have concentrated their attention on Railway and Inniskilling Hills, and to have husbanded their ammunition for what was considered the main attack, and it was to the Monte Cristo guns, apparently, that the support of the 6th Brigade had been confined. For three hours the brigade had borne the brunt of the fight. But the pressure, on its left at any rate, was now at last to be relieved, for Buller had given the word, and Kitchener was rapidly developing his attack on Railway Hill.

Kitchener's dispositions. Preliminary movements of 11th Brigade.

Kitchener had followed Barton across the bridge, and, picking up the West Yorks and Royal Lancasters on the left bank, had moved down as far as the precipitous and bushy gorge which runs down between Railway Hill and Pieter's. From here he despatched four companies of the West Yorks up the gorge with orders to make their way as secretly as possible to the eastern end of Railway Hill. The West Yorks would thus form the extreme right of his line. The South Lancashires were placed in the centre, and the Royal Lancasters on the left, their left resting on Hart's Hollow. The York and Lancasters were in reserve. Thanks to the volume of fire passing overhead, and to the diversion caused by Barton's appearance on Pieter's, the West Yorks succeeded in reaching their station entirely unobserved, and even captured a few unsuspecting Boers among the rocks (3 P.M.). By this time Buller had already signalled to Kitchener to start, and the other battalions had moved forward and were now as far as the railway waiting for the West Yorks to draw level. Methodically, by twos and threes at a time, the West Yorks worked up the steep face of the hill. As he watched

them Kitchener may well have felt himself amply repaid for all the labour he had spent in their training. At last they were well up the slope, and enough of them together to lend weight to the assault.

Capture of Railway Hill.

Kitchener gave the word. In a great wave of khaki they surged up the steep hill-side, the guns keeping up their fire in front of them to the last,* and swept on to the summit. At the same moment Kitchener at last let slip the South Lancashires, whose colonel, McCarthy O'Leary, had for the last half hour been straining desperately at the leash. Up leapt the South Lancashires, and in one wild, glorious rush raced for the great trench, which ran along the level between Railway and Inniskilling Hills. Never checking once, or even pausing for breath, they swept over the broken ground and were into the trench—their gallant and impetuous colonel falling as they reached it—before the Boers had time to run away. A few of the Boers were bayoneted; some 50 or 60 were made prisoners. Meanwhile at the very moment of the assault the Johannesburgers on Railway Hill had been reinforced by a contingent of their own commando, summoned in hot haste from the Upper Tugela. As the West Yorks, now joined by some of the South Lancashires, pushed across the summit they met with a heavy fire from the far side.† But they were not to be stopped and swept right over the top, capturing a maxim and several prisoners. Then manning the Boer sangars they poured a heavy fire after their retreating enemies (5 P.M.). The Royal Lancasters had further to go, and had not drawn level when the assault was delivered. Their two leading companies had only one officer each; both had already been wounded, and, for want of leading, the attack hung fire. But, seeing their comrades on the right charging home, the men would not be denied, and sprang forward. As they did so they came under heavy fire from Inniskilling Hill, which was much nearer to them. Ignorant or forgetful of their proper objective, or perhaps realizing that Railway Hill

* Some of the Yorkshires were actually wounded by the guns, but by now the British soldier had begun to realize that efficient artillery support to the last moment was well worth the chance of such an accident.

† For rallying some of the men on this occasion Captain Mansel Jones received the Victoria Cross.

was already practically won, some 50 or 60 of them turned to their left, and charged straight up the steep slope to the summit, killing and capturing a few of the enemy, and securing a lodgment on the crest, whence they brought a cross fire to bear on the Boers in the main trench, now fully busy with the assault of Norcott's battalions.

Capture of Inniskilling Hill.

Warren had allowed Norcott to move up his leading battalions, the Rifle Brigade and East Surreys, as far as the railway at 3 P.M. But it was not till 5 P.M., when he saw that Railway Hill was completely in Kitchener's hands, that he gave the order for the attack. The two leading half battalions advanced rapidly up the slope, the Rifle Brigade on the left and the East Surreys on the right. The Rifle Brigade came under a heavy frontal and flank fire, the latter to some extent kept down by the Devons on Wynne Hill East, and had to bring up their supporting companies. The East Surreys were fortunately able to carry their attack through without calling on their supports, for the latter had disappeared. Just after the attack had started an unauthorized signal message reached Norcott from Railway Hill asking for help. Norcott sent off the rear half battalion of East Surreys, who were nearest, and the half battalion of Scottish Rifles. Kitchener, however, had never asked for them, and when they reached him ordered them back again. Meanwhile the attacking party had taken the crest in fine style, the East Surreys bringing their right up to within 100 yards of the Royal Lancasters already on the crest. The Boers now abandoned the eastern part of the summit, but still kept up a heavy fire from the western end, till the Rifle Brigade advanced and cleared them off. Even then they only fell back on to the hills to the north-west and into the bed of the Langverwacht, and, supported by several pom-poms, kept up an intensely heavy fire on the skyline of Inniskilling Hill till nightfall.

Last kopje of Pieter's captured at nightfall.

On the right the din of battle continued unabated. Undeterred by their defeat in other portions of the field, the Boers still stood stubbornly at bay on the last kopje of Pieter's Hill. Barton, who, from their strength and the recent arrival of reinforcements, feared a counter-attack, determined to make a last effort to take the kopje. At 6 P.M. he with-

drew three companies of Irish Fusiliers, under Major Hill, from the left, which was no longer menaced, and launched them at the kopje, under cover of a heavy fire from the companies of Dublins already established close up to it. In spite of a furious fire the Irish Fusiliers pushed on. Losing a third of their numbers, and all their officers killed or wounded, they reached the southern end of the kopje. But even now they had not dislodged their obstinate enemy from the northern end of it. Unable to push on further, they put up cover, and at midnight found that the Boers had departed.

Criticism of the battle.

Thus ended the fighting of February 27, and with it the campaign on the Tugela. The battle of Pieter's was a successful finale to the long series of reverses, and it was so simply because for the first time in the whole of that campaign, with the solitary exception of Monte Cristo, the army had been allowed to develop a substantial part of its fighting strength; because it was given a front to move on, and because its brigadiers were given the opportunity which they had never had before for the skilful handling of their brigades. Up to this the history of the Tugela campaign had been the record of the failure of slow and hesitating movements, of small forces operating unsupported on narrow fronts. At last the obvious remedy was tried. The attempt was made to work at least half the troops, and all the guns, in combination. The result was instantaneous, overwhelming, and comparatively easily attained. The victory took six hours to accomplish; it cost under 500 casualties,* and it rolled the Boers back in utter

* Of these, Barton's battalions contributed about 230; the Scots Fusiliers, who had three officers killed and six wounded, and the Irish Fusiliers, having nearly 100 casualties apiece. Kitchener's attack only cost some 130 casualties, the S. Lancs. having about 50, the R. Lancs. and W. Yorks. about 40 each. The Rifle Brigade had 60 casualties, and the East Surreys 40. The total casualties for the fortnight's operations were 26 officers and 347 men killed or died of wounds, and 99 officers and 1,710 men wounded. The Boer losses for the 27th may have been 150–200, the Krugersdorpers and Johannesburgers suffering most heavily. Their total losses for the fortnight were given by the Red Cross Identification Department as 81 killed and 343 wounded; they were probably slightly in excess of this, perhaps 500 in all. Considering the relative positions of the two armies and the tactics employed, this disproportion between their losses and those of the British is by no means extraordinary.

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confusion. The credit of it belongs, in the first place, to Buller: whether he originated the plan or not, he made himself responsible for it. Barton and Kitchener both handled their brigades with skill and judgment; the attack on Railway Hill was an excellent instance of a really well-delivered assault. Colonel Parsons's dispositions for the artillery were admirable—though possibly Barton might have received more support—and contributed in no small measure to the result. Above all, perhaps, does this battle redound to the glory of the rank and file and of the company officers, the heroes of this campaign, who went into it as if the last two and a half bitter months of almost unbroken defeat had never been. The chief criticism that can be directed against the conduct of the day's operations is that the different attacks might have followed rather more closely upon each other, and that the delay thus caused, together with the late start—due to the assumed necessity of transferring the bridge—prevented the possibility of the victory being followed up by an effective pursuit on the same afternoon.

Boer demoralization. Botha's plans for covering retreat frustrated by Joubert's flight.

The night of the 27th put an end to the long and strenuous resistance of the Boers on the Tugela. The defeat only completed the demoralization that had already begun to set in. For a moment Botha, who had come round to Meyer's wing that morning, and had practically taken the direction of the battle out of his feeble hands, was inclined to think that something might yet be done, that another position might still be taken up on the chance of the British being more exhausted than they seemed. But there was nothing to be done with the burghers. Such discipline as ever existed was at an end. To all appeals they had but one answer—they were "going home" (*huis toe*). The only thing to do was to humour them, and trust to rallying them later. In the early hours of the 28th the general retreat began. In a confused mass the wagons streamed away over the plain towards Bulwana. Most of the burghers were with them, or even ahead of them, and Botha had difficulty in keeping together the weakest of rearguards. His chief hope now rested in being able to join Joubert undisturbed, and together with the investing force to take up a covering position to the east

and north-east of Ladysmith, approximately on the ground occupied by the Transvaalers when they first drove back White into the town. This was essential, not only to enable the camps round Ladysmith to be cleared, and the wagons sent ahead to the Biggarsberg, but also to give time to the commandos on the right wing of the Colenso positions to come round. These commandos had, on the 27th, been engaged in nothing more serious than an active interchange of rifle-fire with Lyttelton's men, and were now retreating in some order by Grobelaar's Kloof, the Zoutpansbergers remaining in their positions to the last to cover the withdrawal. They were in no immediate danger. But they had to make the complete circle of the Ladysmith perimeter in order to get on to their line of retreat to the Transvaal. They had fully thirty miles to go to Buller's ten; unless Buller could be held in check for at least two days, their plight might well be desperate. Arriving at the investing lines, Botha, to his dismay, found confusion and flight reigning everywhere. In spite of a telegram from Kruger bidding him make a desperate effort to stop Buller, and to hang on to Ladysmith at all costs, Joubert had no sooner heard of the result of the fighting at Pieter's and of Cronje's surrender than he simply gave the word for a general retreat, and, making no attempt to withdraw the commandos systematically or prepare covering positions for Botha's retirement, had hurried off himself to Elandslaagte. The news of his flight only increased the panic among those who were further in rear and more likely to be overtaken or cut off by the pursuing British. And indeed the position of a great part of the commandos was such that escape seemed hardly possible. Never, perhaps, has a general enjoyed such an opportunity for destroying a beaten and demoralized adversary.

Feb. 28. Buller's disinclination to pursue.

Buller had not the slightest intention of pursuing. The necessity of getting to Ladysmith somehow had at last forced him into the attack at Pieter's. With the success of the attack he immediately relapsed, as on the 18th, into a settled determination to have as little to do with the enemy as possible. If the Boers insisted on taking up another position in front of Bulwana it might be necessary to fight

again. But if they were really going away, what was the use of pressing after them, running into rearguard actions, incurring fresh casualties, when it was perfectly possible to march peacefully into Ladysmith, and attain the object of the campaign without further trouble and molestation? At an early hour he crossed the river and ascended Railway Hill, where he spent a great part of the day contemplating with satisfaction the spectacle of the Boer retreat across the plain. Meanwhile Dundonald's brigade crossed the pontoon by 7 A.M., and getting into touch with some of the Boer rearguard near Pieter's Station, kept up a desultory engagement for some hours. Burn-Murdoch's brigade, which had come up from Chieveley on the previous afternoon, crossed at 8 A.M., and was then halted under Railway Hill till about 1 P.M., when Buller at last allowed it to move out on to the plain south-east of Pieter's. Further delay was now caused by Dundonald calling Burn-Murdoch across to support him, but eventually the latter got in touch with the Boer rearguard who were covering the crossing of the Klip. He prevented the Boers destroying the bridge, and then at dusk received an order from Buller to come in behind the infantry.

Dundonald rides on into Ladysmith.

Towards 4 P.M. Dundonald, who had been gradually pushing forward and had had one or two brushes with parties of the enemy, heard from Major Gough, who was scouting ahead with the Composite Regiment, that the ridges in front were unoccupied. He accordingly moved forward the brigade. The Natal Carbineers under Major Mackenzie, and the I.L.H. under Captain Bottomley, pushed on from ridge to ridge till they reached the open valley south of Intombi. It was now getting late, and Dundonald decided to send the brigade back to Pieter's. But he allowed Gough with his squadrons to go on, and followed himself with his staff a few minutes later. Just before sunset the troopers reached the ford, where almost the whole population had assembled to welcome them, and rode into the town. White with his staff met them in the main street, and a dramatic scene followed, relievers and relieved together joining to cheer the gallant old soldier who had kept the flag flying so long, and whose patient endurance was now rewarded. Thus

ended the 118 days of the siege of Ladysmith. The narrative of the weary closing weeks of the siege after January 6 —the fluctuations of hope and despondency, the struggle against hunger and sickness—will be told elsewhere. At present we have to deal with the main march of military events, and in them the siege of Ladysmith, in its later stages, plays a purely negative and passive part. Now, indeed, on the last day of its separate existence, the Ladysmith force was to give a sign of life, to display a flicker of true soldierly spirit, unavailing, it is true, but none the less useful, if only as a protest against the lethargy of those who could have acted if they had had the will. That evening orders were issued for a small flying column,* under General Knox, comprising all the men still able to march, to be ready to move out and harass the retreating Boers in the morning.

March 1. Attempt of Ladysmith force to harass Boer retreat.

The morning of March 1 found the Boers still in hopeless panic, slowly struggling to get away from the terror of their imaginary pursuers. The main Free State force, with its convoy, was, indeed, safely on its way towards the passes, and a good part of the commandos east of Ladysmith had reached Elandslaagte. But hundreds of wagons and thousands of burghers were still straggling across the plain east of Ladysmith, all striving to join the great crush of wagons now collecting east of Elandslaagte at the Sunday's River drift. An even easier prey was offered by the convoys which had come round by the west of Ladysmith, the greater part of which were still struggling to get across the drift on the Klip River to the north-west of the town, or slowly moving round by the north of it to rejoin their companions. The position guns, which had been taken down from Bulwana and Lombard's Kop late on the previous afternoon, were still at the foot of their hills, and were not loaded into the last train which left Modder Spruit till nearly 11 A.M. Gough's squadrons and the I.L.H. under Karri Davies, who had been sent to reconnoitre the plain towards Bulwana, ascended the hill on one side as the last party of Boers moved away on the other.

* Devons, 4 cos. Liverpools, 4 cos. Gordons, 2 squadrons 5th Dragoon Guards, 2 cos. M.I., 53rd and 67th Batteries, R.F.A., 2 mountain guns.

Before this the Ladysmith "flying column" had crawled out and had begun engaging the rearguard which Botha and Meyer had got together, and with which they were now occupying the hills north and east of Modder Spruit. But the weary and famished troops soon found that it was impossible for them to push any attack home, still less to follow it by a vigorous pursuit. The four-mile march out of Ladysmith had already proved too much for them, and, after struggling manfully to keep their ranks, the infantry were beginning to fall out in batches.

Buller stops Burn-Murdoch pursuing and makes White recall his force.

Buller had been informed of White's arrangements late on the 28th. But he had no intention of co-operating, either with his whole force or with any part of it. During the course of the 28th the troops on Lyttelton's wing had moved up to Pieter's, and units had rearranged themselves into some sort of order, while the transport—including 75 wagons of supplies for Ladysmith—crossed the pontoon. The orders issued that evening for March 1 were for a "move in the direction of Ladysmith." Burn-Murdoch's brigade was to cover the right front and flank of the column, Dundonald's the left. In the morning Burn-Murdoch crossed the swollen Klip by the Boer bridge and approached the foot of Bulwana. He heard the sound of firing at Modder Spruit and knew that he ought to make for it. But he committed the fatal mistake of asking Buller's permission before pushing on with his cavalry, and received a peremptory order to stay where he was. Buller himself rode ahead into Ladysmith about noon, and, meeting White, immediately expressed his strong disapproval of White's efforts, whereupon the latter recalled his fainting but spirited little force. Meanwhile Buller's victorious army, carefully screened by its cavalry against sudden attacks, advanced boldly across the open plain for three miles to Nelthorpe, where Buller rejoined it.

Boer flight continued to Glencoe. Kruger at Glencoe.

All day long on the 1st the roads east and north of Ladysmith were choked with the débris of the demoralized Boer army. By nightfall most of the wagons and all the guns had straggled into Elandslaagte. One of the Long Toms, indeed, had been abandoned in a drift and had lain there for 36 hours, but was eventually picked up and brought in.

Such was the confusion and terror that on a report of the approach of the British the war-commissary, Pretorius, set fire to all the supplies stored up at Elandslaagte. The whole day of the 2nd was spent in getting the wagons over the Sunday's River. Botha and Meyer, who had stayed watching in front of Ladysmith till the night of the 1st, now arrived at Elandslaagte, and endeavoured to get together enough men to occupy covering positions for the day till all the transport was over. But nothing could be done with the burghers; even the posting of sentries at the drift and bridge over the Sunday's River, with orders to shoot the horses of any burghers who attempted to cross, proved ineffective. On the following day the flight continued to Glencoe, to which place Joubert had hastened on the 1st. Here the fugitives were met by Kruger himself, who had hurried down from Pretoria, indomitably resolved to stem the tide of disaster. But neither his entreaties and adjurations, nor even his promise that arbitration or intervention should end the war within a month, availed to inspire the burghers with fresh courage. Some commandos fled all the way to Newcastle before they could be stopped and brought back. On March 5 a great *Krygsraad* was held at Glencoe. Here it was decided to take up positions on the Biggarsberg, and at the same time to send round as many men as could be spared to oppose Roberts's advance. It was the last council of war that Joubert attended. Already seriously ill, he went off to Pretoria, leaving the command in Botha's capable hands.

March 3. Buller's formal entry into Ladysmith.

On March 3 Buller's army made its formal entry into Ladysmith, and the bronzed and service-begrimed battalions of the relieving force marched proudly through the streets lined by the haggard and emaciated garrison. It was a stirring moment, full of the pomp and circumstance of war; full also of its pathos, as men recognized old friends and comrades-in-arms, or looked vainly down the ranks for those whom they expected, but whom they were destined not to see again. But there must have been many in both forces who felt that the pomp and the emotion were out of place while the victory was incomplete, and while the beaten enemy was withdrawing unpunished and at leisure. It was not in

this spirit that Roberts had set the seal upon his relief of Kimberley. With Roberts the relief had been the prelude to the real task, the destruction of the enemy's forces and the occupation of his capital. With Buller it was the be all and end all. After the parade was over, addresses read by the Mayor, and speeches delivered, Buller issued a special order to the troops of both forces, thanking them for their efforts.

Underlying causes of Buller's failure.

Thus ended the campaign for the relief of Ladysmith. In the memory of the British people it will long live as a deeply dramatic event, with its alternations of hope and disappointment, with its tale of struggle oft renewed, to be crowned with success at the last. But, setting aside its dramatic and emotional significance, it is as a display of supreme military incapacity that it will find its permanent place in history. It is hardly necessary, at this stage, to repeat the criticisms that have already been made in previous chapters on Sir Redvers Buller's generalship; what is really important is that we should understand the underlying causes of his failure, and make use of the lessons it conveys. After all, here was a brave soldier who had served with distinction in various minor campaigns, who since then had risen to high rank in the British Army, whose personality inspired his equals and his subordinates with respect and confidence. What was the cause and meaning of his utter failure? Are they to be sought wholly in the man himself, or in the environment that created and moulded him? To some extent, undoubtedly, the causes of Buller's failure were personal and individual to himself. War is a terrible examiner, of men as of nations: it takes no count of peace reputations; it inexorably drags to light hidden defects of mind and will. In every great war there have been unexpected failures, and always must be. Buller was one of these. But he was also something more. To say that Buller was a disappointment will not explain Colenso, or Spion Kop, or Vaal Krantz, or some of the amazing events recounted in the present chapter. Disappointment implies the failure to act up to a certain presupposed standard. It is a question of degree. But the Natal campaign shows no glimmering of the recognition of the ordinary standards by which generalship

can be measured. It is of a kind by itself; conditioned not only by the defects of a single personality, but by the whole constitution and character of the British Army.

Dangerous influence of small wars.

That army, indeed, was in no sense organized for serious war. Neither the training it gave, nor the career it provided, nor the atmosphere in which it lived, were such as to fit its members for the task of conducting real military operations. Neglecting all study of military history and military theory, the only operations it took cognizance of were the punitive expeditions against troublesome savages, or the marches to relieve garrisons cut off by some sudden outbreak of rebellion, which it dignified by the name of wars. As tests of energy, endurance, and personal courage, these expeditions were undoubtedly useful. Of the principles and methods of serious warfare between tactically equal forces they taught nothing. But in the absence of any intellectual training to balance them it was inevitable that the habits and ideas engendered in these expeditions should become deeply ingrained. The real clue to Buller's generalship, and to his whole attitude, is to be sought in the fact that he was applying to a whole army, and against serious opponents, the same methods that he had been accustomed to apply to small columns in little wars against tactical inferiors. To keep the convoy close to the troops, or even in their midst, to look carefully after the soldier's comfort, to go by the easiest and most direct route, were among the most obvious general rules for the wars to which he had been accustomed. For strategy and tactics they had offered no scope. Time in them had rarely been a matter of pressing importance. Their objects had not, as a rule, seemed to justify, and their circumstances had not often called for, a heavy sacrifice of life.

Peace training of British army. Not Buller but the nation to blame.

And if that was the character of the ordinary British general's "war experience," what was the character of the peace training which followed, when success in "war" led to high military position? Was that calculated to foster the good qualities developed in these expeditions, and, at the same time, to balance the false military notions they tended to inculcate? On the contrary, the higher official

work of the British Army, with its deadening routine, with its make-believe manœuvres, with its absence of all that corresponds to the scientific study and planning of war, so far from correcting any errors, only tended to weaken the character and the intellect, and to suppress all warlike instincts. But in an army where generalship was neither theoretically studied, nor tested in practice, it is not surprising that men should attain to the highest offices, and command the fullest confidence of others in much the same plight as themselves, without possessing the slightest traces of that quality. When the circumstances are dispassionately considered it becomes clear that there really was no conceivable reason why Buller should have shown himself a general. And, if he failed, the blame must rest, not with him, but with the system which made him what he was, with the nation which confidently bade him undertake a task of overwhelming difficulty, for which he was fitted neither by experience, nor by training, nor by disposition. The man himself, baffled, bewildered, distracted, disheartened, at times even unnerved by the terrible responsibility thrust upon him, is a figure which calls for sympathy and regret, not for reprobation.

Defects and virtues of Buller's army.

But the system which failed to create or select a general failed no less to provide him with an effective instrument for his task. With a well-organized staff, with highly-trained, purposeful subordinates, with a common tradition of military method ingrained in the whole force, no general, however unequal to his position, could have done the things that Buller did. But the environment which made Buller what he was also made those who served under him. His failings were also their failings. The lack of strategical or tactical insight, the indifference to organization and to the securing of information, the slowness, the irresolution, the absence of any real fighting instinct, the fear of bold, far-reaching decisions, the dread of losses—these were defects which, in varying degrees, showed themselves in almost every senior officer who took the field during the war. Buller, indeed, combined all these defects in a more marked degree than any one other, or, at least, was thrust into a position where a

more mercilessly searching light was thrown upon them. For that reason he will always remain the typical embodiment of the British military system of his day, as tested in its first contact with the hard reality of war. That the test did not result even more grievously, that Buller did at last break his way through to Ladysmith, was due to two causes: to the weakness of his adversaries, and, above all, to the fundamental soundness of the material of which his army was composed. The deficiencies of the British regimental officer, and of the men whom he led, were many, and they have been dealt with in more than one chapter. But their deficiencies were, after all, completely overshadowed by their virtues; and it was those virtues that, in the end, broke the Boer resistance and relieved Ladysmith. Their fearless courage, their patient endurance, their imperturbable cheerfulness in defeat, their unquestioning loyalty to their leader, lend dignity and pathos to a story most of which would otherwise be profoundly depressing, and give a sure hope of better things. If there is one clear lesson we may draw from the Tugela campaign, it is that British soldiers, trained as they might be trained, and led with courage and science, need fear to match themselves with no army in the world.

CHAPTER XVII

THE ADVANCE TO BLOEMFONTEIN

Steyn and Kruger at Bloemfontein. Decision to stop Roberts at all costs.

On the morning of February 27 President Steyn had arrived in the laager at Poplar Grove to exhort the burghers to some fresh effort to relieve Cronje. Before many hours he received the terrible news of Cronje's surrender. His visit had been fruitless. But he now knew the worst, so he believed, and returned to Bloemfontein to see what might be done to repair the effects of the disaster and to check the British advance. On his way he met fresh tidings of misfortune: Colesberg reoccupied, and the British pushing forward to the Orange River; Ladysmith relieved, and the commandos in Natal flying in helpless, panic-stricken confusion. At any moment Roberts might push on to Bloemfontein, and the fall of the capital might paralyse the whole resistance of the Free Staters. He appealed to the elder President for help and counsel. Kruger had come back from Glencoe on March 3 with but slight assurance that his impassioned appeals had been effective, and that the burghers would make any stand in their new positions if Buller pressed after them. But he knew that the danger in the Free State was the most pressing, and the very next night hurried down to Bloemfontein. A conference between the Presidents and their chief advisers took place on the 5th. It was resolved to stop Roberts's advance at all costs, and to get together every available man for the purpose. By now there were fully 6,000 burghers assembled at Poplar Grove under De Wet. De la Rey, with part of his commandos, was still round Bloemfontein,* waiting

* The Johannesburg Police had been actually in the town some days, but they had been so mutinous and had so terrorized the inhabitants by their indisciplined conduct that they were moved several miles out to avert further mischief.

for his transport and the dismounted burghers to come up from Norval's Pont, but would be ready to push on in a day or two. Further reinforcements from the Biggarsberg and from the Orange River would be coming up as soon as the situation became clear at those points. If only Roberts would wait a week longer at Paardeberg it might be possible to get together fully 10,000–12,000 men to bar his way, a larger force than the Republics had brought into the field anywhere since Joubert's original march into Natal.

Kruger goes to Poplar Grove to encourage the burghers.

Even more necessary than numbers was courage. From the moment the fortune of war had begun to change there had been signs of disheartenment, and now voices already made themselves heard on every side, openly urging the abandonment of the struggle, and a surrender to the British demands. To counteract the faint-hearted, to convince the timid and inert that the whole national ideal, that the very existence of the Republics was at stake, and rouse them to activity and courage, was, indeed, the chief task to which the Presidents set themselves from this time onward. One of the first results of the conference on the 5th was the despatch of a message to the British Government, of which it is enough to say at this moment that, while couched in the form of a suggestion for peace, its main object was to provide arguments for a more determined resistance. That same afternoon Kruger left Bloemfontein for Poplar Grove, hoping to arrive in time to inspire the burghers with some of his own unconquerable spirit before they were once more called upon to face the enemy. Before leaving he addressed a public meeting in Bloemfontein, and again on his way addressed the laagers outside the town, the theme and form of his speech being in each case based upon the long message sent to Botha and Meyer a fortnight earlier.*

The Boer position at Poplar Grove.

At Poplar Grove, meanwhile, the burghers had been busily occupied, since Cronje's surrender, in taking up and intrenching a series of positions astride of the Modder River and across the direct roads to Bloemfontein on either bank. These positions covered a front of more than 25 miles. The extreme right was posted in the hilly country which, at an

* See p. 511.

average distance of eight or nine miles north of the river, extended from the Koedoesrand-Boshof road, past Damplaats and Blue Hill, till nearly due north of Poplar Grove. This section was held by the Boshof burghers, and by other contingents which had come round through Boshof with Kolbe or been sent from Fourteen Streams, and was reinforced on the 6th to a total strength of, perhaps, 1,000 men and three guns. Separated from these hills by three miles of open valley was a lofty table-topped hill known as the Loog Kop, nearly four miles north-west of Poplar Grove Drift. This formed the right of the main Boer position, and from it the Boer trenches ran south across the open veld, striking the river a mile west of the drift. This section was held by Senekal, Bethlehem and Potchefstroom burghers, with one gun on the summit of Loog Kop. On the left bank the trenches, here held by the Heidelbergers and Bloemfonteiners, ran south for nearly two miles till they struck a steep ridge, which for the first mile trended away from the river, and then ran roughly parallel to it for another three miles. This section was held by Edenburg, Ladybrand and Bloemfontein burghers with three guns, their main strength being concentrated on a very prominent kopje, known as Table Mountain, near the western end of the ridge. Beyond this western end, which was barely three miles from Makow's Drift, the ridge turned abruptly to the south and ran along for five miles to a cluster of pointed kopjes known as the Seven Kopjes. These formed the extreme left of the Boer line, and were held by Bloemfontein, Ficksburg and Philippolis burghers with three guns. The Winburgers were held in reserve near Poplar Grove. As against a direct frontal advance along the river it was a very defensible position. Its weak point was the left flank, which was within easy reach of the British, and was completely in the air.

Roberts determines to catch the whole Boer force.

These dispositions were well known to Roberts; considering the proximity of the two forces they could hardly have been otherwise. On the 2nd and 3rd the cavalry had pushed up as far as Loog Kop in the hope of cutting off a convoy going to Boshof. Their reports as to the hilly country on their left, though then still quite weakly held, and Major

Lawrence's reconnaissances on the south bank, led French to suggest to the Commander-in-Chief that the whole of the cavalry should move in a body round the exposed Boer left on to the open ground in rear. The idea at once took root in Roberts's mind and soon developed into a remarkably ambitious and far-reaching project. This was nothing less than to capture bodily the whole of the Boer force south of the river. French with his whole division was to ride in a great sweep round the Boer left and place himself across the Boer line of retreat to Bloemfontein. At the same time two divisions of infantry were to deliver an enveloping attack upon the enemy's positions. Driven out of their positions, and finding their natural line of retreat barred, the Boers would be forced to try and escape by Poplar Grove Drift. Another division marching along the right bank would block their escape in that direction. The whole Boer force would then be compelled to take to the river bed, where it would sooner or later have to surrender. What Roberts aimed at, in fact, was another Paardeberg, on an even greater scale, but carried out scientifically, and free from the confusion and waste of life which had marked Kitchener's attack. It was a bold and ingenious conception, and it had in it all the elements of a great success. But to that success certain conditions were essential. The distance French had to cover was at least 17 miles: it was essential, therefore, that his movement should be well advanced before the Boers could get an inkling of what was in store for them. An early start by the cavalry, and a quick development of the infantry attack in the centre to engage the enemy's attention, were clearly advisable. Again, the meshes of the net that was to be cast round the Boers would at first be very wide. Large though French's force was it could not make sure of stopping a really determined attempt on the part of the Boers to break through at any one particular point on the twelve miles of open veld between Seven Kopjes and the river east of Poplar Grove. Given time to think, they could always escape: it was only by attacking them vigorously at every point, pressing close upon them, bewildering and confusing them, while the meshes of the net were rapidly drawn tighter, that there was

any reasonable prospect of shepherding them into the trap before they realized the fate in store for them.

On the afternoon of the 6th Roberts summoned all his general officers to headquarters and expounded his views in the following address, which was intended to take the place of any written orders :— March 6. Roberts's address to the generals.

"I have asked you to meet me here this afternoon in order to communicate to you the proposed plan of operations for to-morrow. The enemy, as you know, occupy a strong, but somewhat extended, position in our immediate front. Their object is, of course, to block the road to Bloemfontein, and, so far as the information we can procure goes, it is apparently the only place between here and Bloemfontein where our progress could be checked. It is difficult to calculate the exact strength of the enemy ; but, allowing that the troops withdrawn from Colesberg, Stormberg, and Natal have joined, it seems scarcely possible that it can number more than 14,000 at the outside, with perhaps 20 guns. To meet this number we have some 30,000 men and 116 guns. My intention is to send the Cavalry Division, with Alderson's and Ridley's Mounted Infantry, and seven batteries of Royal Horse Artillery, to threaten the enemy's line of communication with Bloemfontein. To avoid coming under the enemy's fire throughout this distance the cavalry will have to make a detour of about 17 miles. This would bring them to the south bank of the Modder River, probably some two miles above the Poplar Grove Drift. It is very likely, however, that General French may find some vulnerable points which it would be desirable for him to attack before he reaches the river. The destruction of their laagers practically cripples the Boers, as we have learnt from experience. There are three or four laagers reported to be on the places marked on the plan, a copy of which has been supplied to all officers in command, and it would be well worth General French's while to bring the fire of his 42 guns to bear on them. The Boers are very clever at taking cover themselves, but they cannot hide their wagons, transport animals, and riding ponies, and the destruction of these must in time bring them to terms, the more especially as they will be cut off from their supplies at Bloemfontein. It is intended that the Sixth Division, with its Brigade Division of Artillery, and the Howitzer Battery, and also Martyr's mounted troops (except

those ordered to join the Seventh Division), should follow the route to be taken by the Cavalry Division for about six miles. It will then be on the south-east of the 'Seven Kopjes,' the southernmost limit of the Boer position. General Kelly-Kenny will not, I think, have much difficulty in driving the enemy off these kopjes. They will be shaken by knowing that the cavalry have passed round their rear, and a judicious use of mounted infantry, and a combined bombardment of 24 guns, will further dishearten them. The first position to which the Boers can retire from the 'Seven Kopjes' is 'Table Mountain,' distant $4\frac{3}{4}$ miles. They should be followed up by the Sixth Division, which will be assisted in its attack on 'Table Mountain' by the Brigade of Guards, the four 4·7 naval guns, Flint's Brigade Division of Artillery, and Le Gallais's mounted troops. This latter force will assemble at daybreak at the posts now held by Le Gallais's and Martyr's troops, distant nearly two miles from the Headquarters Camp. The 'Table Mountain' is the key of the enemy's position, and with that in our possession they will have to retire into the Modder River, as Cronje did, or force their way across it. The Seventh Division (14th Brigade only) is occupying the ground hitherto held by the 2nd and 3rd Brigades of Cavalry. It will have with it its Brigade Division of Artillery, Nesbitt's Horse, New South Wales and Queensland Mounted Infantry. The duty of the Seventh Division is to threaten the enemy as best it can, and draw their attention from the main attack on the 'Table Mountain.' Should they show signs of retiring across the river, the Seventh Division should move eastwards towards the Drift and endeavour to harass them as much as possible. The Ninth Division will act in the same way on the north bank of the river. It will have to look out for the hill on its left front, on which the Boers had a gun a day or two ago. This division will be accompanied by three naval 12-pounder guns, and its left flank will be protected by two regiments of mounted infantry, under Lieutenant-Colonel De Lisle. Lieutenant-Colonel Rhodes will be good enough to arrange that signalling may be carried on throughout the day between the headquarters and the several infantry divisions. My headquarters will be with the Guards Brigade, at the post now occupied by Le Gallais' mounted troops. The Principal Medical Officer will be pleased to see that medical arrangements are made suitable for the movements of the several divisions as above indicated.

General officers in command will issue orders that their troops are to take cooked food with them, and that a supply of water is to be arranged for as well as circumstances will admit. All baggage should be left in camp."

Criticism of these instructions.

The general character of the proposed operation is perfectly clear from this exposition. At the same time several points call for comment. There is a certain vagueness about these instructions that would hardly have been found in written orders. No hours are indicated either for the start or for the arrival of the cavalry at the Modder River, or for the infantry attack upon the Seven Kopjes. As regards the first point, French and his staff urged that the cavalry should be allowed to start that evening and bivouac at Grogspan so as to be well on its way round before daylight. They might very well have suggested an even wider sweep, such as the cavalry had made for the relief of Kimberley, intended to bring it on to the Boer rear from the direction of Petrusburg. But Roberts was afraid that this might betray his plan to the Boers, and he decided in favour of a start at 2 A.M. As for the infantry attacks the instructions clearly indicated that the Sixth Division attack would not take place till after the cavalry had got round, and that the Guards and 14th Brigade were to wait till the Sixth Division had cleared the Seven Kopjes and approached Table Mountain, before joining in. It is impossible not to recognize in these dispositions a certain halting between two ideas; between the great scheme for capturing the whole Boer force on the one hand, and on the other, the desire to take the Boer positions most easily and at the least cost of life. The development of the attack from the flank was undoubtedly the easiest way to take the position, if that were the only object. But it would also obviously draw the attention of the Boers to their flank and rear, and thus tend to give away the whole plan. And in any case it would take longer and thus increase the Boer chances of escape. Orders given with an eye to the great prize alone would have caused the infantry attack to be delivered simultaneously along the whole position at daylight, or even at Table Mountain first,

and would have forbidden the cavalry to aim at any subsidiary object, such as the shelling of laagers, before it got into its position across the Boer line of retreat. Lastly, it is difficult to find in these instructions any insistence on the supreme necessity of rapidity and boldness in the movement of all arms. The suggestion to Kelly-Kenny that a heavy bombardment, a judicious use of mounted infantry, and the previous movement of the cavalry would make his task one of no great difficulty, points clearly to a careful and deliberate attack. Judicious tactics are undoubtedly useful in their place. But decisive results in war are only to be won by speed of movement and ruthless determination.

Preliminary movements.

The evening of the 5th and morning of the 6th had meanwhile been spent in transferring all the cavalry and horse artillery from the right bank to the left, leaving their outposts to be occupied by the 4th M.I. and Roberts's Horse, and by the infantry of Colvile's division. The whole of the cavalry, the Sixth Division, the Guards, and the M.I. brigades attached to each of these units, all bivouacked that night at Stinkfontein under the lee of the low kopje to the north-east known as Le Gallais's Kopje, on which the naval 4·7 guns were to be mounted before daybreak. Tucker bivouacked on the left bank just below Makow's Drift, with Colvile immediately opposite across the river. Henry and De Lisle were at Ferdinand's Kraal, four miles north of Colvile.

March 7. The start. Slowness of cavalry and infantry.

At 3 A.M. on the 7th, an hour later than Roberts intended,* the Cavalry Division started off, and, moving slowly, reached the large dry *pan* at Damfontein at 5 A.M. Here French halted to wait for daylight (5.45 A.M.). This delay, added to the late start, was most unfortunate; not only did it prevent the cavalry itself from being well round the Boer position by daylight, but it also caused the Sixth Division to be held up for over half an hour to let the tail of the cavalry column pass. Making a better pace the cavalry now pushed on. It was almost due south of the Seven Kopjes before the Boers discovered it and opened a harmless long-range fire. French

* The hour seems to have been changed by French on his own initiative, from a dislike apparently of long night marches.

moved away to the right to avoid it, and took cover under a spur of rising ground at Kalkfontein. Here there was a large dam, and, as this seemed a suitable opportunity for watering the horses, another halt was called. A battery was sent out to shell the rear of the Seven Kopjes, and two squadrons occupied some hills three miles east, but the mass of the division remained halted for over an hour. For once French seems to have shown himself hardly sufficiently mindful of the supreme necessity for speed. Kelly-Kenny meanwhile had marched on, sending Martyr ahead to keep touch with French, and about 7 A.M. began deploying his brigades in a leisurely and cautious fashion under cover of a rise two miles south-west of the Seven Kopjes, upon which his artillery began at the same time to direct their fire.

The Boers abandon the position.

Nearly two hours had passed since daylight, during which the Boers on the Seven Kopjes had enjoyed abundant leisure to study the British plan and to decide how to deal with it. Only one decision was possible, and that was to make their escape with all speed while there was yet time. To hold the Seven Kopjes against an enveloping attack by so overwhelming a force was out of the question. Accordingly, at about 7.30 A.M. the Boers began withdrawing from the Seven Kopjes and from the whole ridge to the north, and moving north-eastwards towards Poplar Grove. As no one was pressing them, their movements were at first quite leisurely; they were considerably accelerated when, half an hour later, from six miles off, one of Lieutenant Grant's naval 4·7's landed a lucky shot right into the middle of them. The evacuation of the Seven Kopjes rendered the rest of the Boer position untenable, and the burghers soon began streaming away from Table Mountain and the ridge to the east of it. To cover the withdrawal of the wagons and guns, the various commandos sent out small flanking detachments to the long low rise which ran out in a south-easterly direction from the ridge between Seven Kopjes and Table Mountain.

Kruger's arrival and departure. De Wet finds

Of these movements the Boer commander, De Wet, was, for the moment, quite unaware. The action had not yet begun that morning when Kruger drove up in a Cape cart

Boers in full retreat.

with four horses, attended by a bodyguard of mounted police. De Wet went to meet the President, and with him entered a tent in order to discuss the situation and to make arrangements for the address which Kruger intended to deliver to the burghers. While they were discussing the guns opened fire. De Wet had already received reports of suspicious cavalry movements on the left. A further report that the whole British cavalry were heading for Petrusburg, and the sound of the guns, convinced him that the situation was serious. It was no time for addresses, and Poplar Grove was no place for the aged President. Yielding to his entreaties, Kruger reluctantly mounted his Cape cart and drove away (8 A.M.). De Wet now rode back to look after the action, which he supposed was just beginning. To his dismay he found the whole of the left wing in full retreat streaming away towards the Bloemfontein road and absolutely indifferent to his efforts to stop them.* It was too late to retrieve the day; all that remained was to organize a rear-guard and keep off the pursuers.

Kelly-Kenny's slowness; Roberts's impatience.

Before daybreak Roberts with his staff ascended Le Gallais's Kopje, whence he could command a view of the whole position. Daylight showed him the cavalry and Sixth Division still disappointingly near, but moving off to their positions at a fair pace. An hour passed, nearly two hours; the Boers began to abandon their positions, evidently as the result of French's presence in their rear. But the Sixth Division showed no signs of moving to the attack. At last (7.45 A.M.) Roberts impatiently signalled to Kelly-Kenny, ordering him to move forward and along the ridge to Table Mountain without delay, as the enemy had left the Seven Kopjes. This information had already reached Kelly-Kenny from French a few minutes earlier. But Martyr's

* De Wet, who saw nothing of the action till the flight had begun, does not seem to have realized that retreat was the only possible course after the Seven Kopjes had been turned, and, apparently, attributed the conduct of the burghers to sheer unreasoning panic and to the demoralization caused by Cronje's surrender. Cronje's fate, no doubt, quickened the Boers' perception of the object of French's move. But their withdrawal was not very hurried at first, and only degenerated into a panic afterwards when the real danger was over.

patrols had reported that, though the kopjes themselves were abandoned, large numbers of Boers were still on a low ridge behind; Kelly-Kenny had not nearly finished getting his right hand brigade (13th) into the best position for an enveloping attack; not even the Field-Marshal was going to hurry him into a premature frontal attack across the open. Roberts waited, regretting, possibly, that he had not once more sent Kitchener to hustle his excellent, but over-cautious, subordinate. Another hour and more of exasperating delay passed, the only consolation being the hope that French, at least, was playing his part behind the ridges, and would succeed in heading off the Boer retreat till the slow infantry came up. At 9.15 A.M. Roberts again signalled to Kelly-Kenny, telling him that the kopjes had been abandoned for more than an hour, and that, unless he pushed on, the whole day would be spent before he reached the enemy. At last Kelly-Kenny began to advance. Slowly and cautiously the attack developed. Shortly before noon, four hours after the Boers had left it, the whole Seven Kopjes position had fallen into British hands, without a single casualty. Concurrently with his last message to the Sixth Division, Roberts ordered forward Colvile, Tucker, and Pole-Carew, following himself with the corps artillery and the Naval Brigade. Impatient as he was with Kelly-Kenny, and evident as were the signs of Boer retreat, he, too, had up to this refrained from pressing forward across the open to a frontal attack on Table Mountain without the co-operation of the Sixth Division on the flank. In the one case, as in the other, devotion to the tactical form overmastered the living spirit of the combat.

Advance of the cavalry. The opportunity still favourable.

We must now return to French, whom we left watering his horses at Kalkfontein. Ordering the whole of his division forward under cover of the low ridge three miles north of Kalkfontein, he rode on himself with the advanced scouts to the left hand end of the ridge—the end nearest to the Seven Kopjes and to Table Mountain—in order to study the situation and decide on his next step. As he rode up (8.30 A.M.) he saw the whole of the shallow valley between the ridge and the steep southern face of the Boer main position alive with Boers, most of them moving north-east-

wards with their wagons, while others were galloping towards him to join their flank guards, which were already vigorously engaged with the cavalry scouts. It was evident that the enemy were abandoning the whole of their positions, and were not going to await the infantry attack. If Roberts's plan was to be carried out at all, it was imperative for French to neglect all subsidiary issues, and, without losing a moment, to push on at full speed to the destination assigned to him in his orders. But it was not too late for success, and his division could hardly have been better posted than it was for playing its part. Broadwood, with the leading brigade, was already occupying a farmhouse on a low hillock at the far end of the ridge, where he was within seven miles of the river, nearer to it, in fact, than a great part of the retreating mass of Boers. Alderson was close behind Broadwood, and Gordon was extending along the ridge to his left. To send these three brigades, with their guns, forward across the open at once, leaving Porter and Ridley to extend along the ridge and prevent any attempt at breaking out southwards, was the course clearly indicated. Had that been done, Poplar Grove might still have achieved the great success to which Roberts aspired.

French hesitates and draws in his division to the left.

Had the Sixth Division been up on the Seven Kopjes ridge, and pushing on after the retreating Boers, had his own horses been fresh, we can hardly believe that French would have hesitated for a moment. But the infantry showed no signs of coming. The Boers were in large numbers; they had not been shaken by any attack, and were, apparently, prepared to take the aggressive themselves. His experience in the somewhat similar operation behind Kitchener's Kopje on February 21 suggested that if he moved away the bulk of his force to the north-east, the Boers might break through to the south and make havoc of the brigades left to check them. His horses were in very poor condition; some of the gun-teams, more particularly, were scarcely able to trot.* The

* The condition of the cavalry horses had been the cause of a certain amount of latent friction between the cavalry and headquarters during the halt at Paardeberg and Stinkfontein, the view on the one side being that the cavalry were indifferent horsemasters, and on the other that head-

sense of his own weakness in manœuvre, due to this cause, possibly, too, the fear of being criticized for bad horsemastership if he asked too much of his horses, may have further contributed to make French unwontedly slow and circumspect. He decided to keep his division well closed up, so as to prevent any counter-attack, and to move due north upon the enemy's main body, so as to shorten the distance to be covered by his horses. This meant pushing after the enemy's rear instead of getting in front of him and intercepting his retreat, in other words, a complete departure from Roberts's plan, for which French would seem to have consoled himself by assuming that the Boers meant to retreat across Poplar Grove Drift in any case.* In accordance with this policy of contracting his front he now (9–9.30 A.M.) recalled Broadwood from his advanced positions, ordering him to close in to the left under cover of the ridge, and sent word to the whole of his horse artillery to come up on the left to shell the retreating Boers and their wagons. He then proceeded gradually to push his left forward, till by 10.30 A.M. his line of guns was within three miles of Table Mountain.

Boer snipers seize E. end of ridge and have to be turned off.

French's mistake was no sooner made than it was punished. One of the Boer flanking parties which had been sent south-east to check the advance towards the river at once dashed into the positions reluctantly evacuated by Broadwood. Occupying the farmhouse and hillock, and extending along under the northern slope of the ridge, they seriously threatened the whole of the right flank. Creeping along still further in the long grass, they presently opened a hot flanking fire on Rochfort's batteries, which were on the right of the line of guns. Waking up to the situation, French now determined to retake the position he had just abandoned. Guns were brought round; Alderson's M.I. were sent to the

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quarters had no idea of the amount of work they were asking from the horses, and of the insufficiency of the forage ration allowed. A misunderstanding about the returns of horses drawing rations seems to have intensified this feeling.

* This assumption is contained in the messages sent by him to headquarters in the course of the morning, in one of which he also describes himself as driving the enemy before him.

right to turn the enemy's flank from the south-east; Broadwood was detailed to hold him in front; Gordon and Ridley were to clear the rest of the ridge. A squadron of the 9th Lancers, which attempted to charge round the Boer right flank, was driven back in confusion with some loss. But Alderson eventually retook the position (11–11.30 A.M.) and drove off the stubborn little party which had kept the whole Cavalry Division in check for nearly two hours. From the captured hillock Alderson could see the whole Boer force streaming away with nothing but an open plain between. His horses were comparatively fresh, and it was an opportunity for which it was worth while killing half of them. He immediately sent back word to French and requested to be allowed to pursue. French, still hesitating, ordered him to stay where he was.

French pushes on, but is again held up by the snipers. Close of the action.

But the Sixth Division was now at last coming over the Seven Kopjes, and Le Gallais's M.I. had crossed the ridge further north and were appearing at the southern foot of Table Mountain. There could no longer be any possible reason for not advancing. French rode off to the right (12–12.30 P.M.) and ordered Broadwood to move round to the east of the kopje held by Alderson and push after the Boers across the open—in other words, to do what he might have done three hours earlier. The rest of the line were to follow. Broadwood pushed on some four or five miles, when two Boer guns unexpectedly opened on him from the river bank. The brigade fell back. As it did so a handful of Boers—the remnant of the plucky little party that had already held up the whole division and had retreated east behind Bosch Kop—crept up behind a slight fold of ground running northwards from Bosch Kop to the river and suddenly opened a short-ranged fire upon it and upon French and his staff (2 P.M.). Their counter-attack completely achieved its purpose. Instead of pushing on to the river, sending out a flanking detachment to deal with these snipers on his right, French withdrew his force out of range of the guns and proceeded to clear the Bosch Kop position with all formality. Broadwood was brought right back and sent round to the south of it, and Alderson, supported by the batteries, attacked it in

front. By the time this was successfully done, and the Boers had cantered off, thoroughly satisfied with their day's work, it was 4 P.M., the horses were completely done up, and the main body of the enemy were miles away. The whole division now dragged itself wearily down to the river, which it reached about 6 P.M., all except Broadwood's brigade, which collapsed entirely at a *pan* some three miles short of the river, and eventually crawled into bivouac after dark. Martyr's and Le Gallais's M.I. brigades and the M.I. detachments with Tucker had meanwhile reached Poplar Grove, and had begun skirmishing with the Boer rearguard about the same time as French fell back in order to deal with the snipers on Bosch Kop. But they made no attempt at a vigorous pursuit. Behind them the infantry, of whom Tucker's men were a long way the first, gradually made their way into bivouac at Poplar Grove, having marched from ten to twenty miles without firing a shot.

Doings of Colvile's division.

The part to be played by the Ninth Division in the execution of Roberts's plan was entirely conditional upon the successful shepherding of the retreating Boers into Poplar Grove Drift. With the failure of the enveloping movement, Colvile's operations therefore ceased to have any special tactical significance, and only call for the briefest description. The division moved off at 4.30 A.M. The Highland Brigade proceeded along the river bank, with orders to keep in touch with Tucker on the other side. The 19th Brigade was sent north-east in order to be in a position to outflank and capture Loog Kop, as Colvile realized that, with this commanding point in their possession, the Boers might easily delay his advance long enough to allow the force on the south bank to cross over. The 4th and 6th M.I. and two squadrons of Roberts's Horse moved out north and north-east from Ferdinand's Kraal to guard the left flank against the Boers in the hills. The Highlanders proceeded very slowly and cautiously, thoroughly searching the banks, and even after 9.15 A.M., when the general infantry advance began, their advance was anything but rapid. Towards noon Colvile ordered Smith-Dorrien to send across the Canadians to support them. Smith-Dorrien halted for some time at Three

Stone Hill facing Loog Kop. About 11 A.M. he received Colvile's order to push on, but waited a little longer in the hope that the Mounted Infantry would get further forward so as to cover the left flank of his advance. Meanwhile the naval guns, which had at first been shelling the retreating Boers on the other side of the river, engaged in a vigorous duel with the Boer gun on Loog Kop. The Boers now began evacuating their positions on the right bank as well, and, towards 1 P.M., Smith-Dorrien moved forward into the valley between Loog Kop and Blue Hill, and after a very slight skirmish took the farm north of Loog Kop. Two companies of the Shropshire L.I. were sent up the hill to take the gun which the Boers had not had time to remove. The rest of the Shropshires pushed on to the Slagt Kraal ridge, where they found a Boer rearguard, and suffered the only infantry casualty of the day. Eventually the whole division bivouacked at Poplar Grove Drift on the north bank.

Criticism of the action.

Entirely uninteresting as a fight, the action at Poplar Grove is, for the student of war, one of the most instructive of the whole campaign. The failure of Roberts's bold design of catching the whole Boer force has been ascribed to a variety of causes. It has been suggested that the Boers were too demoralized to make any stand at all, and too alert to be caught, and that, therefore, the plan had no chance of success from the first. For this there is no evidence. On the contrary, the Boers were clearly caught napping by the turning movement; they took some time to realize its import; and when they retired it was at first in so leisurely a fashion that for another two or three hours at least the cavalry still had a chance of cutting them off. Another cause to which the failure has been freely attributed is the condition of the cavalry horses. The possible indirect effect of this upon French's decisions has already been discussed. All the same the cavalry did, as a matter of fact, cover considerably more ground during the day than was required for the execution of the original plan. Instead of twenty miles, the outside limit of what the plan demanded, Broadwood's brigade must have covered nearly forty. After all, what checked and delayed the cavalry, when they did attempt to push forward, was not

the exhaustion of their horses, but Mauser bullets. Was the cause of the failure then simply French's unskilful handling of his force, and his neglect to carry out his instructions? In a sense this is true. Whatever the reason, this was not one of French's successful days. He never really seems to have had his heart in the business, and allowed himself to be deterred by considerations and checked by obstacles which on most days he would have "taken in his stride." Had he played up better to Roberts's plan he could hardly have failed to achieve at least a partial success. But, if French's failure was the most obvious specific cause of the Boers' escape, it was not the only cause, perhaps not even the chief cause. It was itself, to no small extent, the direct consequence of another cause—the failure of the infantry attack. Had Kelly-Kenny attacked with promptitude, he would either have engaged the attention of the Boers, or else have converted their retreat into a real flight; in either case French would have felt himself freer to act with boldness. Whether, even so, it was really necessary for French to wait all the morning for Kelly-Kenny to come up on his left, is beside the point; just as it is also beside the point to urge that Roberts, on the other flank, should not have allowed Kelly-Kenny's delay to have held back Pole-Carew and Tucker.

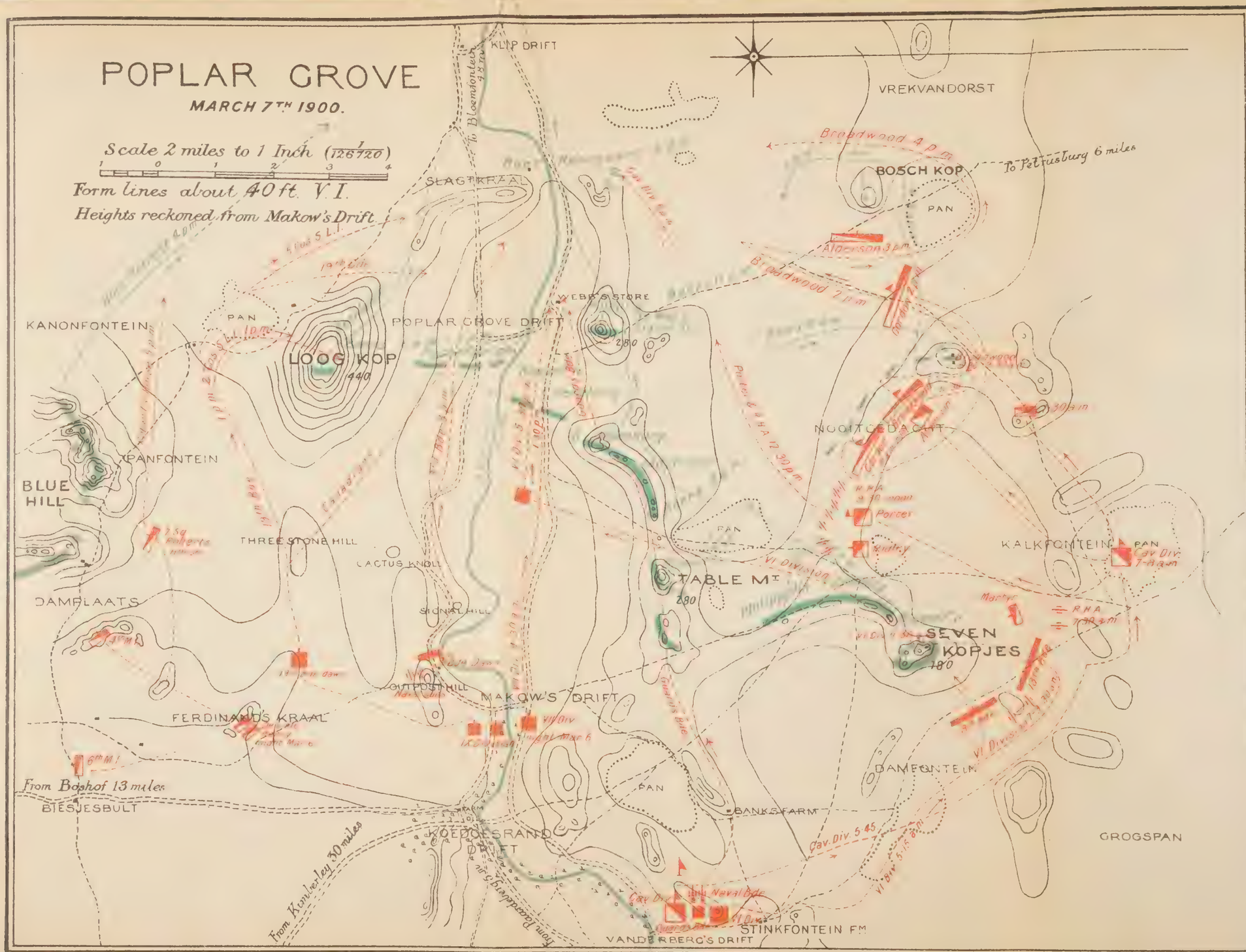
The true and false deductions from Paardeberg

But the real causes were more deeply rooted and more pervading than the particular mistakes of this or that commander. Those causes were over-caution and the fear of losses. It was French's over-caution that caused him to close up his force and wait during the most critical hours of the day; it was his fear of "unnecessary" casualties that caused those exhausting turning movements against a mere handful of men; that allowed the fire of two guns to stop Broadwood's brigade. In Kelly-Kenny's case this over-caution seems almost ludicrous. Yet it would be entirely wrong to fasten special blame on Kelly-Kenny, who was by no means an incapable general. The blame lay in the attitude of mind which pervaded the whole army. That attitude had only been intensified by the battle of Paardeberg. So far from taking Paardeberg as an example—capable, no doubt, of being improved upon—the army had taken it as

a warning, as a type of all that they should avoid. This attitude was shared by Roberts and by the headquarters staff. Though the story current in the camp at Paardeberg, that Roberts had expressed the greatest indignation at Kitchener's conduct, was unfounded, yet the general conclusion from it—that Roberts intended to have no more attacks in the Paardeberg style—was correct, and was, indeed, evident from the whole character of the operations after the 19th. Poplar Grove was the consequence. At Poplar Grove Roberts attempted to achieve the same result that Kitchener had achieved at Paardeberg. His plan was as well thought out and as skilful as Kitchener's was haphazard and defective. But the spirit that had inspired Paardeberg, however imperfectly—short-circuiting to regimental officers when generals proved impervious to its impulses—was not there; and Roberts failed. Unfortunately the causes of failure remained unrecognized. Even worse, the very fact of failure was soon lost out of sight; what was remembered was that the Boers had been driven out of a carefully prepared position at the cost of barely 50 casualties. What had been done once could be done again, and was done. It was at Poplar Grove that the useful but dangerous secret of easy victories was learnt—the secret which carried the British arms to Pretoria, but which also sowed the seeds of the guerilla war to follow.

March 8–9. Halt at Poplar Grove. Kitchener sent to Western Cape Colony.

The bulk of the force remained halted on the 8th to allow its transport to come up. The cavalry, however, marched on in the afternoon to Waaihoek, some twelve miles upstream of Poplar Grove, while the Sixth Division marched about seven miles to Roodepoort. The Seventh Division was completed by the arrival of the 15th Brigade. The Ninth Division crossed over to the south bank. The halt enabled Roberts once more to turn his attention to affairs in other parts of the theatre of war. From the western rebellion came news of a very disquieting character. On the 6th Colonel Adye had moved out from Britstown, west of De Aar, with some of the Warwicks M.I., two companies of C.I.V., and the 44th Battery, had engaged Liebenberg and his rebels at Houwater, some 20 miles out, and had been driven back with


POPLAR GROVE
MARCH 7TH 1900.
Scale 2 miles to 1 Inch (1/126720)
Form lines about 40 ft. V.I.
Heights reckoned from Makow's Drift
KLIP DRIFT
To Bloemfontein
VREKVANDORST
Broadwood 4 p.m.
BOSCH KOP
To Petrusburg 6 miles
PAN
Alderson 3 p.m.
Broadwood 2 p.m.
SLAGTKRAAL
WEBB'S STORE
280
POPLAR GROVE DRIFT
KANONFONTEIN
LOOG KOP
440
NOOITGEDACHT
PANFONTEIN
BLUE HILL
THREESTONE HILL
CACTUS KNOLL
SIGNAL HILL
TABLE MT
280
KALKFONTEIN
Cav. Div. 7-8 a.m.
Porter
Ridley
Martyr
SEVEN KOPJES
180
DAMPLAATS
OUTPOST HILL
MAKOW'S DRIFT
FERDINAND'S KRAAL
DAMFONTEIN
From Boshof 13 miles
BIESJESBULT
BANKS FARM
KOEDOESRAND DRIFT
GROGSPAN
Cav. Div. 5.45
From Kimberley 30 miles
Naval Bde
STINKFONTEIN FM
VANDERBERG'S DRIFT
DIRECTIONS
British
Boers
Guns
Koffyfontein Laager

a score of casualties. An immediate advance of the rebels on De Aar seemed seriously threatened. But any interference with the railway at De Aar might have disastrous consequences. Once more Roberts decided to send off Kitchener to set things right, ordering him to superintend the whole of the operations west of the railway, and remain there till order was restored. On the same day he urged Methuen to proceed with the clearing of the Boshof district, so as to disperse the commandos which had been on his flank during the Poplar Grove engagement. From Buller, too, a message arrived on the 9th or 10th earnestly requesting to be allowed to keep the Fifth Division, so as to be strong enough to push on and turn the Boers out of the Biggarsberg. To this request Roberts provisionally assented, at any rate till he could judge the situation after reaching Bloemfontein.

Orders for the march to Bloemfontein.

No movement took place on the 9th, but in the afternoon orders were issued for the march on Bloemfontein. Roberts's information led him to believe that the Boers expected him to move directly on Bloemfontein by the main road, and were preparing to dispute his passage at a range of hills at Bain's Vlei, some ten miles from the town. As his chief object at the moment was to seize Bloemfontein, and as any check or delay outside might interfere with his plans and enable the Boers to remove provisions and rolling-stock, he decided not to take up the challenge, but to slip past the Boers and strike the railway to the south of the town. His arrangements for the march were determined first of all by convenience of movement and considerations of water supply; secondly, by the desire to mislead the Boers as long as possible as to the direction of his march; and, thirdly, by the possibility of opposition on his right flank from the commandos now vacating Cape Colony. With these objects in view he divided his force into three columns. The left column, consisting of the Sixth Division, Porter's Cavalry Brigade and Alderson's M.I., was entrusted to French; the right column, consisting of the Seventh Division, Gordon's Brigade and Ridley's M.I., to Tucker. The rest of the force, under his own immediate supervision, formed the centre

column. The point at which all the columns were to reach the railway was Leeuwberg, some 12 miles south of Bloemfontein. On the 10th French, who was already ahead, was to push straight on towards Bain's Vlei as far as Baberspan, while he himself moved by a more southern road to Driefontein, and Tucker almost due south to Petrusburg. On the 11th he would push on to Aasvogel Kop, leaving Tucker to come up to Driekop on his right rear; French, instead of continuing his advance on Bain's Vlei, was to turn sharply to the south-east and come down close in front of the centre column at Doornboom. On the 12th the infantry of the left and centre columns was to march, again swerving away to the south-east, to Venter's Vallei, twelve miles west of Leeuwberg, while the cavalry pushed right on to the railway. Tucker was to march up behind the others, the whole force being now no longer abreast, but strung out on a single road. On the 13th the united left and centre columns were to reach the railway, while Tucker closed up to Venter's Vallei. The average length of these marches was 10–15 miles for the infantry; the columns would be about ten miles from each other at first, but would soon converge. These arrangements were based on the assumption that the Boers did not intend making any serious resistance nearer than Bain's Vlei. French's patrols, indeed, reported on the 9th that the Boers were in force at Abraham's Kraal, less than ten miles east of Waaihoek. But French was inclined to conclude that they intended to resume their retreat, and the information of the patrols that part of the Boer force was crossing north of the river seemed to him to confirm the rumour that the Transvaalers and Free Staters had quarrelled and were separating. He reported in this sense to Roberts, who ordered him, even if they stayed, to disregard them, and continue his march to Baberspan along the open veld south of the Abraham's Kraal kopjes.

Kruger's effort to check the Boer flight.

The Boer retreat from Poplar Grove, which had been comparatively leisurely at first, soon degenerated into a disorganized flight. But the burghers were not so much terror-stricken as completely disheartened by the ease with which they had been turned out of their positions. The secret of

their weakness had been found out, and for the moment resistance seemed to most of them useless. The best thing to do was to go home and give up fighting. In this spirit the fugitive commandos streamed away towards Bloemfontein on the afternoon of the 7th and morning of the 8th. At Abraham's Kraal they found Kruger and De la Rey, the latter of whom had just come up with the Johannesburg and Pretoria Police and some of the Colesberg detachments, perhaps 1,000–1,500 men in all, on his way to Poplar Grove. Once more, as at Glencoe, the aged President endeavoured, by the power of his personality, to stay the rout. Standing by the roadside he addressed the burghers as they came by, reproaching them for their cowardice, appealing to their patriotism, promising that the war would end in a few weeks if only they would hold out and prevent Bloemfontein from falling into the enemy's hands. At first all his efforts seemed unavailing. The burghers shook their heads and rode on. "Despair seemed depicted on his hard leaden features; threateningly he lifted his heavy stick against the fugitives, whom no one seemed able to check; at last he ordered the detachment of Pretoria Police close by to shoot every one who attempted to pass." * No one was shot; but gradually, by hustling and persuasion, a certain number were stopped, while others came back later, when it was eventually decided to take up a position at Abraham's Kraal.

Boer decision to stand at Abraham's Kraal. Their positions.

The information which had reached Roberts, that the Boers intended to make a stand at Bain's Vlei, if turned out of Poplar Grove, was substantially correct. On the 8th De Wet rode on to Bloemfontein, and, together with Steyn, selected a line of positions at Spitz Kop, five miles out of Bloemfontein, on which the commandos could fall back for the defence of the capital. Here, too, most of the burghers whom Kruger and De la Rey had failed to stop were subsequently rallied. Meanwhile, however, the leaders at Abraham's Kraal had decided that it would be fatal to allow Roberts to march unopposed almost into Bloemfontein. A determined stand at some point on the way would gain time for reinforcements to arrive, for preparations to be made, perhaps even for

* Captain O. von Lossberg, 'Mit Santa Barbara in Südafrika.'

diplomatic intervention, and might do much to restore the burghers' confidence in themselves. It was by these tactics, after all, that Methuen's march had been delayed, and finally brought to a halt within a few miles of its objective. If Spitz Kop was to be another Magersfontein, it must be preceded by another Modder River. There was not much choice of positions between Poplar Grove and Spitz Kop, and Abraham's Kraal would do as well as any other. Some low, flat-topped kopjes south of Oertel's Farm effectively commanded the main road along the river. These were strongly intrenched and held by the Johannesburg Police and by the bulk of De la Rey's force, under P. Botha, Celliers, Kolbe, and A. P. Cronje of Winburg, with two or three guns. The right wing, under P. de Wet and Andries Cronje, was pushed forward for nearly two miles in the river-bed, while smaller detachments were posted across the river. The left flank was thrown back on an isolated group of well-defined kopjes on Damvallei Farm, nearly four miles south-east of the centre. Here were the Pretoria Police and some Bloemfonteiners and other Free Staters, under P. Fourie, and four guns—2 Krupps, and 2 of the 15-pounders captured at Colenso. These were the original dispositions, and De la Rey's hope was that the British, coming along the road, might, as at Modder River, think they only had a rearguard in front of them, and ram their heads against the centre of the position. Subsequently, owing to the representations of Commandant Vilonel, it was decided to prolong the left flank. Vilonel, with 500–600 men, mainly Winburgers and Senekalers, and three or four guns, was detached to hold the low Driefontein and Boschrand kopjes south of Damvallei, and De la Rey promised to come to his support with the police if the main attack should, after all, be in that direction. The total Boer force assembled on the evening of the 9th was, perhaps, 5,000–6,000 men, with a dozen guns.*

* Boer accounts differ very greatly as to the strengths on this occasion, some giving the whole force as low as 1,500. Not more than 1,500 at the outside were actually engaged on the Driefontein-Boschrand kopjes, where the main action took place. But the united forces of De Wet and De la Rey should have been at least 7,500, and it is doubtful if more than 2,000 actually fled all the way to Bloemfontein.

March 10. Patrols report Boers in strength.

At 6 A.M. on the 10th French's column left the bivouacs at Waaihoek and Roodepoort, and started on its march to Baberspan. In accordance with Roberts's instructions, French intended to avoid the Abraham's Kraal kopjes. At the same time he had very little doubt that the enemy were dispersing, and had no intention of making a serious stand. Soon after 7 A.M., however, he received a report which indicated that, after all, this might not be quite the case. Major Scobell had been sent forward at 4.30 A.M. with a squadron of Scots Greys and a company of 7th M.I. to reconnoitre, and at daybreak (5.45 A.M.) had occupied a small kopje two miles west of the intrenched kopjes at Abraham's Kraal. His advanced scouts had pushed on to within 400 yards of the Boers before drawing fire, and successfully disclosed the fact that the Boers were in strength on the Abraham's Kraal and Damvallei kopjes, and had at least three guns. On receiving Scobell's report, French with his staff rode up to a rise on his right front, two miles south of Scobell's kopje, to survey the position.

French surveys the situation.

Below him lay a broad, shallow valley running southwards from the river on his left. Straight opposite him, directly across his route to Baberspan, stood up the serrated outlines of the Damvallei ridge, nearly five miles away. A mile nearer, to his left front, lay the low, hassock-like Abraham's Kraal kopjes, to the left of which could be seen the green plantation and substantial homestead of Oertel's Farm. About equidistant to his right front was a low ridge stretching across for two miles, behind which the ground rose in a series of small steep-sided kopjes, with long spurs and deep re-entrants. The northern part of this broken ground, which stretched back some four miles from the first ridge, has usually gone by the name of the Driefontein (or Alexandra) kopjes, from the adjoining farm; the southern by that of the Boschrand. Over the top of the Boschrand could just be seen the conical peak of Aasvogel Kop, 14 miles south-east of French's point of vantage. Directly on his right was Driefontein Farm (Du Toit's), the appointed bivouac of the centre column, the dust of whose coming was already visible away to the south-west. Round Abraham's Kraal and at

Damvallei Boers were plainly seen riding about, and the startled movements of a large herd of buck in the valley suggested the presence of an invisible cause of alarm beyond. But on the Driefontein kopjes there was no sign of life, and, soon after, the patrols, who had ridden up to the first ridge, reported them unoccupied. Ordering Porter, who had halted in the valley just in front of him, to push forward and get in touch with the enemy, French sent back word to Kelly-Kenny, whose troops were likewise halted for breakfast some four miles in rear, to advance and support the cavalry, as the Abraham's Kraal position was strongly held. Kelly-Kenny had already, a few minutes earlier, received a heliogram from Roberts to avoid the Abraham's Kraal kopjes, but to look well after his transport, and now rode forward to see French. The two commanders decided to give both the Abraham's Kraal and Damvallei kopjes a wide berth, and to march along the north side of the apparently unoccupied Driefontein kopjes to a point a little south of Baberspan. Orders were sent back to the infantry to advance (10 A.M.).

9 A.M.–noon. Cavalry in action. Boers reinforce Driefontein.

Meanwhile Porter, still keeping his main body halted, had, about 9 A.M., sent forward "Q" Battery, escorted by a squadron of cavalry and a company M.I. Trotting forward a couple of miles the battery came into action against the Damvallei ridge. The Boers at once opened with their guns from both ends of the ridge, and with a gun and pom-pom on the veld east of the Driefontein kopjes. The escort promptly scattered, but the battery remained in action till dusk, keeping up a desultory artillery duel, at 4,000–5,000 yards' range, without suffering a single casualty. "U" had, at the same time, moved northwards, and engaged the Boer guns near the river, but on being relieved by the 82nd R.F.A., which by French's order had been sent forward to help protect the flank, it moved south to join Porter. The latter had been ordered to push across the valley and occupy the Driefontein kopjes preparatory to the infantry advance. But his movements were not very rapid, and while he was still in the low ground French and his staff on their kopje could see a body of 600–700 men emerge from behind the Damvallei ridge and ride round to the rear of the Driefontein

kopjes (10.30–11 A.M.). These were, as the watchers rightly conjectured from their regular formation, the "Zarps," accompanied by De la Rey himself. They were followed by other parties under Celliers, Kolbe, De Beer and others, so that this part of the Boer position was now considerably strengthened. While Vilonel with the original force held the Boschrand, the newcomers reinforced the Driefontein kopjes, of which only the eastern part had been held up to this, and that not in any strength. The main body proceeded with all speed to pile up stone *schanzes* along a long and narrow ridge running east and west, and thus transversely to the north-western edge of the higher ground, or first ridge as it appeared viewed from the British side. But small parties pushed forward to the edge, driving away a British patrol which had occupied the north-eastern corner. Seeing this, French at once ordered Porter to push back the Boers by turning their left flank. Inclining to the right Porter sent forward two squadrons of the Carabiniers under Major Sprot, who successfully dislodged the Boers from a rocky kopje at the extreme south-western end of the first ridge. While Porter was extending against the rest of the ridge, and bringing "T" and "U" into action (11.30–12 A.M.), French rode across to the kopje just captured by Sprot, where he remained for the next few hours.

Martyr in action against the Boschrand.

But though French had seen some of the reinforcements which had come up to the Driefontein kopjes, he had not realized that the position had already been occupied before, and therefore still considerably underestimated the strength of the Boers immediately in front of him. But not only had the Boers been in occupation of this part of the ground since the previous evening, but they had already that morning been engaged with the troops of the centre column. About the time that French rode up to his first position, Martyr had come up with his Mounted Infantry across the veld some two or three miles south of Driefontein Farm. His errand was a curious one. He was acting as escort to the field telegraph section, which Roberts, supremely confident that no serious resistance was to be expected along the route of the central column, for the first day at least,

had sent on the 9th to Katdoornput, 12 miles ahead of his main body. From there it was now marching in to its appointed bivouac at Driefontein, when suddenly it came under fire from some Boer patrols on a kopje west of the Boschrand. While the telegraph section scuttled out of harm's way, Martyr seized the kopje, and, pushing forward, secured a lodgment on the south-western spur of the Boschrand. Meeting with considerable opposition, he made no attempt to push any further, but prepared to hold on till the centre column should arrive.

Arrival of Broadwood. Failure to secure co-operation.

Towards 11 A.M. Broadwood came up along the same route, after a twenty mile ride from Poplar Grove. Seeing Porter's squadrons engaged with the Boers on the Driefontein kopjes, he heliographed to ask if he could help. French replied: "No assistance required," assuming, apparently, that Broadwood's line of march would, in any case, cause him to outflank the Boers, which would suit his own plan much better than if he came up directly in support of Porter. He quite overlooked the fact that Broadwood had already reached his destination, and would not, without special reason, push on further than was necessary just to make the bivouac secure. Nor did it, apparently, occur to him that Broadwood might have no notion of what the left column was trying to do, and that it might be well to communicate the situation and his own plans to him as fully as possible. Left to his own devices, Broadwood joined Martyr, and, subsequently moving beyond him, made an attempt to secure a lodgment on the southern face of the Boschrand, but was repulsed. He accordingly moved south-east, and occupied a little kopje at the head of the broad, open valley which ran north-eastwards in rear of the Boer positions (2.30 P.M.). Here he waited, hoping to join in and cut off the retreat of the Boers when French should have succeeded in dislodging them. Knowing nothing of the Boer occupation of Abraham's Kraal and Damvallei, he took it for granted that the Boers only held the Boschrand–Driefontein position, and that the left column, pursuing its normal direction to Baberspan, would therefore turn the right flank of the Boer position. What could have induced the Boers to

occupy an isolated position in strength, and wait there till both their flanks were turned, is a question he does not seem to have asked himself. However, his mere presence where he was was not without effect, for it induced De la Rey, alarmed at the thought of a wide turning movement by the British, to send off Commandant Weilbach with 500 Heidelbergers to Aasvogel Kop in order to prolong his line.

12.30–3 P.M. Infantry occupy first ridge. Cavalry move off to right.

While Porter was skirmishing along the Boer front, the infantry were steadily coming up. By noon they were half-way across the valley, and came under desultory shell-fire from Damvallei and long-range sniping from the north-eastern end of the first Driefontein ridge. The force was halted with the leading companies well deployed, while the 76th and 81st Batteries came into action. Their fire, joined to that of Porter's guns, and effectively helped by "a" from the flank, speedily caused the Boers to abandon their advanced positions and fall back on the main ridge. French, seeing this, and still under the impression that the total number of Boers in front of him was very small, jumped, apparently, to the conclusion that the Boers were going altogether. He sent back a message to Kelly-Kenny to resume his march, as the enemy were in full retreat. At 12.30 the advance was resumed, the 18th Brigade leading. The Welsh, in the centre, moved upon a small cattle kraal at the north-eastern end of the ridge; the Essex were on the left; the Yorkshires on the right, aiming at a small kopje a few hundred yards east of the one already occupied by Porter. The Buffs and Gloucesters of the 13th Brigade followed. The remaining two battalions of the brigade, together with the 82nd Battery and Alderson's M.I., the whole under General Knox, had been left by Kelly-Kenny further behind as a flank guard. It did not take many minutes to discover that the Boer retreat had not gone very far. Kelly-Kenny and his staff, who had galloped forward towards the ridge on receipt of French's message, were among the first to learn the fact, and had to dismount hastily and seek cover from the heavy fire which was opened on them. At the same time the Damvallei guns opened on the transport, which was hopefully trundling along, on its road to

Baberspan, towards the open gap between Damvallei and the Driefontein kopjes. Meeting with this unexpected welcome, the convoy beat a hasty retreat, while the 81st Battery moved forward and diverted the attention of the Boer gunners. Even the infantry, though they reached the foot of the ridge without difficulty, found a tremendous fire directed upon them the moment they appeared over the crest; the Essex on the left were kept uncomfortable, even below the crest, by the enfilade fire of the Damvallei guns, which no serious attempt was made to silence. The occupation of the first ridge was followed by a certain pause in the action. "U" Battery was moved round to the south-east of French's kopje, and opened a cross-fire upon the sangars on the main ridge. Four of Porter's squadrons were sent forward to join Sprot, who was now ordered, with the whole five squadrons, to move still further round and support Broadwood, who seemed to French to be making very little progress. But it was not till over an hour later that Porter, with the rest of his brigade and "T" Battery, moved after him as far as the south-western spur of the Boschrand.

Kelly-Kenny decides to attack the main position. 3.30 P.M.

Meanwhile, at 3 P.M., Kelly-Kenny sent a message to French, who had gone round with Porter, to tell him that he was not pushing beyond the crest, but was awaiting the turning movement by the mounted troops. At the same time this turning movement was very slow, and Kelly-Kenny was beginning to be anxious and impatient. The afternoon was passing away. If by any chance the Boers were not turned out before nightfall, it would be impossible for the force to bivouac just in front of them, and it would be compelled to fall back some miles. Roberts's whole plan for the advance on Bloemfontein might be seriously affected. There was every reason, in fact, in favour of a determined effort to clear the position at once. At 3.30 P.M. Kelly-Kenny received the following message from Roberts, now coming up ahead of the infantry of the centre column: "I believe enemy in front of you to be in no great strength. Push on to camping ground." With authority as well as reason on his side, Kelly-Kenny rightly decided to wait no longer, but to attack the main position without delay. He called up

Stephenson and ordered him to make his dispositions for the 18th Brigade. Stephenson ordered the Welsh, who were now extended along the whole of the crest as far as the Yorkshire kopje, to advance frontally, over the 800–1,500 yards of grassy plateau between, against the western end of the main ridge, and then push along it to the east. The Yorkshires were to move round the Boer left. The Essex were to threaten the Boer right, but to keep a sharp look-out to their own left in case of a counter-attack.

Advance of Welsh, Buffs and Glo'sters in centre.

Under a tremendously heavy fire the Welsh pushed forward by short rushes. They suffered considerable losses, and by the time the companies on the left had got within 600–800 yards of the foot of the main ridge their advance was stayed. The companies on the right had secured a lodgment on the extreme western end of the ridge, and driven the Boers out of their advanced sangars, but after a while they, too, could make no further progress. Kelly-Kenny now sent word to Colonel Hickson to take forward the Buffs. Moving up under the crest and heading straight for the end of the ridge, the Kentish men pushed into the line of the Welsh right hand companies, on both slopes of the ridge. The first knoll was cleared, and the advance was slowly but steadily resumed in the teeth of a murderous rifle fire, which raked the whole length of the ridge from its higher northern end, assisted from both flanks by all the guns and pom-poms the Boers could bring to bear. But, as usual, the weight of artillery fire was on the side of the British, and this time the British gunners were in no doubt as to the right target to aim at. Pushing up on the left of the main ridge to within 1,600 yards of the Boer sangars, they kept up a steady rain of shrapnel, in the face of which accurate shooting was almost impossible. To help in directing their fire and to get up further reinforcements, Hickson now came back and was immediately wounded. Captain Moss, with two companies of the Gloucesters, was sent forward, and pushed one into the firing-line on the left. Yard by yard, from boulder to boulder, the staunch infantrymen made their way to within 300 yards of the main sangars, where the "Zarps"—mainly Pretoria Police under De Hart—Celliers's

Fordsburgers and Boksburgers, and stalwarts from various Free State commandos, were hanging on with equally splendid determination (5.30 P.M.).

Of Yorkshires and Essex on right and left.

As soon as the Buffs had pushed forward to support the Welsh, Kelly-Kenny sent word to Major Fearon, who, with the leading half-battalion of the Yorkshires, had been keeping up a long-range supporting fire from their kopje, to move after his rear companies, which had already begun to move across the open ground round the Boer left. As the Yorkshires advanced they came under fire from the western face of the Boschrand on their right, and, going forward to meet this fire, drew away from the Driefontein ridge, and—except for Captain Esson's company, which maintained the original direction—became a containing rather than an enveloping wing. Meanwhile, on the other flank, Stephenson had originally ordered the half-battalion of the Essex, which was prolonging the left of the Welsh, not to attempt to press too far across the perfectly open ground, and had kept back the other half-battalion to guard his left flank. But the centre had now been strongly reinforced and pushed up to the point from which a decisive charge home could be made. Circumstances had diverted the enveloping attack on the right. It was all the more essential to press forward on the left, and with all speed, as the day was slipping away. Stephenson ordered the whole of the Essex to swing round across the open, and to push home against the steep northern face of the ridge. In long lines, well shaken out, the Essex swept over the plain, unchecked by the rifle-fire in front, or by the plunging shell-fire from flank and rear. A slight fold in the ground, 800 yards from the ridge, afforded partial cover. Here they lay down to recover themselves before the final assault. To Roberts, watching the fight from the kopje west of Du Toit's farm, the issue of the attack still seemed so uncertain that he ordered the Guards and 19th Brigade, who were just marching in, to move forward to support the Sixth Division.

The final assault 6 P.M.

But for some time the Boers had begun slipping away in twos and threes. The advance of the Essex, whose extreme flank already threatened the little hollow below the ridge

where their horses were waiting, increased their anxiety and swelled the number of the faint-hearted. The signs of wavering were not long in being detected by the British. Towards 6 P.M. word was passed along the scattered ranks that the enemy were retreating, and that the line would advance. There was a lull in the firing as both sides braced themselves for the final effort. Suddenly the Essex on the left sprang to their feet and raced forward. In a moment the whole line took the lead and went straight for the positions in front of them. In grim desperation the Boers discharged their magazines, but there was no stopping the long wave of victorious infantry as it surged up to and over the low breast-works that had held it back for so many hours. They could still hope to inflict losses. Lomax, the adjutant of the Welsh, fell, shot through the heart, as he was cheering on the line into the trenches. Lieutenant Parsons of the Essex, leading on his men with a gallantry as conspicuous as that which won him the Victoria Cross at Paardeberg, was mortally wounded before he reached the northern foot of the ridge; Lieutenant Coddington reached it and scrambled up—the first man on the actual summit—only to fall to a fatal bullet. But even so the Boer fire was high and wild, and the casualties in the final charge were not exceptionally heavy. The defenders, having done as much as flesh and blood can do, fired their last shots, ran down the back of the hill and leapt on to their horses. But for once the Boers were late, and they were heavily punished before they got away. Some 30 men remained and let themselves be taken prisoners. On the last, south-eastern knoll of the ridge, indeed, occurred one of those incidents which are almost bound to occur in modern warfare. A handful of Boers on one part of the knoll made signals of surrender, and came forward to deliver themselves to the Buffs. Some of the latter, standing up incautiously in their eagerness to take over the prisoners, attracted a heavy fire from the far side of the crest and suffered several casualties.* A bayonet-charge cleared the

* The incident was witnessed from the kopje west of Driefontein Farm by Lord Roberts, who addressed a remonstrance to President Steyn. Steyn, instead of justifying the conduct of his burghers, as he had every

knoll a minute later. The whole Driefontein position was now in British hands—the Boschrand was not entirely evacuated by the Boers till after dark—and the victorious troops proceeded to reassort themselves and to put out outposts for the night.

Failure of cavalry pursuit.

About 2,000 yards away from the captured position the Boers halted for a few minutes, and then moved away north-eastwards. They were in no great hurry, for they were out of rifle-range, and neither guns nor cavalry came up to pursue them. Broadwood, indeed, was at that moment making a belated effort to push after some of the Boers retreating from the Boschrand. But he was not posted far enough round to deal with a retreat north-eastwards, and eventually returned empty-handed at dusk. Sprot's arrival at 3 P.M. might have given Broadwood some idea of the true situation. But it never occurred to him to ask what was happening, and to the end he remained in blissful ignorance of the fact that the infantry were anywhere within ten miles of him. Even now he seems to have gone on assuming that French was turning the Boer position on the north, though it might, one would imagine, have suggested itself to him that French, in that case, was hardly likely to send away five squadrons of his single cavalry brigade. Having no particular need of Sprot's support where he was, he sent him off towards Aasvogel Kop with the idea of having his right flank covered when he came to make the charge for which he was waiting. Sprot went some distance, came under fire from Aasvogel Kop, and eventually returned, while Broadwood carried out the belated pursuit already referred to.

Criticism of the action. Casualties.

Driefontein was essentially a battle of encounter, and, as such, almost inevitably developed in a fashion which precluded the carrying out of a fixed tactical scheme. Before French had any clear idea of the enemy's position and strength, the bulk of his troops were committed beyond recall. There is no reason, therefore, for laying any stress on the criticism of the tactical form employed. Judging after the event, it

right to do, retorted that it was the British who had raised the white flag! The incident is typical of the curious views about such signals of surrender entertained by both sides. See the footnote on p. 268.

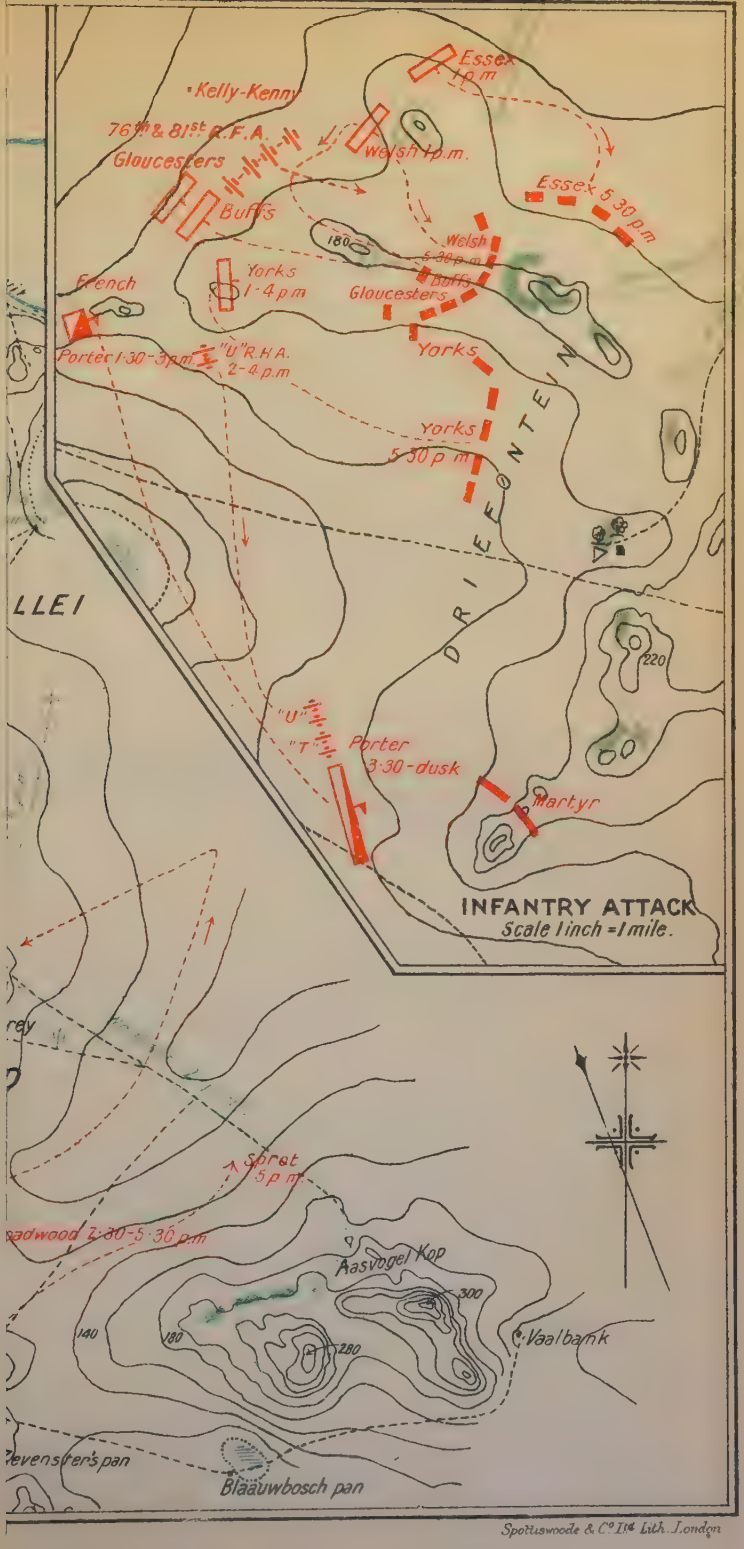
certainly looks as if greater results might have been attained if French's cavalry had been kept back to charge round to the north of the position during or after the infantry attack, and the turning movement on the south left to Broadwood. But the scheme actually initiated was quite good enough for its purpose had sufficient precautions been taken to ensure its successful working. What paralysed the whole action, setting aside the infantry attack, was the deep-rooted indifference to the acquiring and communicating of information, the inveterate incuriousness, the readiness to take things for granted, which permeated the British Army, and were as conspicuous at Driefontein as at Spion Kop or Paardeberg. The actual division of the force, too, intended for marching rather than for fighting purposes, may to some extent have contributed to depriving it of effective direction. Martyr and Broadwood were both directly under Roberts, and French may have hesitated to give them orders without reference to Roberts, and reluctant to appeal to Roberts to be allowed to use them till he was quite sure that the Boers were really in force and the assistance was required. The only successful element in the action was the infantry attack, and of that the credit belongs not to French, who only intended to contain the enemy with his infantry, but to Kelly-Kenny, who took upon himself the responsibility of doing the right thing and then proceeded to do it in the right way. The capture of the Driefontein ridge is, indeed, an admirable example of a well-delivered attack. The steady development of the fire-fight, the close co-operation of the artillery fire with the infantry advance, and its concentration on the task of keeping down the enemy's rifle-fire instead of trying to search out scattered and invisible guns out of range, the final coincidence of the frontal and flanking attacks, are equally worthy of careful study. In all these features, and to some extent in those of the ground, Driefontein bears a close resemblance to Elandslaagte, and a detailed comparison between the two actions is not uninstructive. The credit of the success belongs, as already stated, to Kelly-Kenny, and with him to Stephenson, who set the attack in motion. But it belongs no less to the officers and men of the battalions who carried it through with

such admirable steadiness and dash. Where all played their part right well, it would be invidious to mention any one battalion in particular. The Welsh, who bore the brunt of all the earlier part of the attack, were the heaviest losers, having 140 casualties. The Buffs and Essex had 100 apiece. The total casualties of the day were six officers and 76 men killed or died of wounds, and 18 officers and 324 men wounded, or 424 in all.

The Boer side of the action. Positions taken up round Bloemfontein.

The Boer casualties were, for them, exceptionally heavy, probably not far off 100 killed and perhaps 200 more wounded.* The heaviest losers by far were the "Zarps," more especially the Pretoria section. No praise can be too high for the steadfastness displayed by them on this day. Altogether, indeed, the spirit shown by the Boers at Driefontein was very different from what might have been expected after the wild flight from Poplar Grove, and ought, perhaps, to have suggested great caution in taking their demoralization during the next few weeks as final. That the action failed, from the Boer point of view, to achieve its purpose was solely due to Kelly-Kenny's decision to attack. But for that the Boers would undoubtedly have held their positions for the day, and, even if they had subsequently withdrawn before the advance of Roberts's whole force, would have gained both time and self-confidence. The main credit, both for the plan and for the conduct of the action, belongs to De la Rey. De Wet arrived in the course of the morning, but does not seem to have taken any effective part in the battle. During the night of the 10th and on the following day the Boers retreated towards Bloemfontein, the retreat once more speedily degenerating into a rout. Outside Bloemfontein they were rallied and took up the positions already selected for them. These positions were at an average distance of five miles from the town, and formed a complete semicircle round its western front, extending over a length of about 15 miles. With the example of Driefontein before them their leaders were not

* The Boer official account at the time gave out the casualties as 7 killed, 18 wounded; other contemporary Boer accounts give the figures as 80 or 90 killed, or as a total of 300. Lord Roberts's despatch stated that 102 were buried on the ground.



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altogether without hope that the defence might prove successful. At the same time they were fully prepared for the other alternative. The Free State archives had already been removed to Kroonstad on the 9th by the State Secretary, Mr. Blignault, and other arrangements were now made for the transference of the seat of government.

Roberts decides to hasten on. March 11 and 12.

The action at Driefontein, in so far as it might have given the Boers some indication of the direction of Roberts's march, was only an additional reason for speed. On the 11th the army moved on; the now united left and centre columns to Aasvogel Kop and Doornboom, Tucker to Driekop, where he was now ordered to wait till joined by a convoy coming up from Stinkfontein under escort of the Hampshires, Warwickshires, and 4th and 6th M.I. On the morning of the 12th French, who had once more reverted to the position of a cavalry commander, and now had under him the 1st and 2nd Brigades, with Alderson's and Martyr's M.I., pushed on to Venter's Vallei. Here Roberts joined him, and directed him, instead of continuing the wide turning movement up the Kaal Spruit to Leeuwberg, to turn in to the north-east and make a dash for the Brand Kop, a prominent cluster of hills directly overlooking Bloemfontein from the south-west, and barely four miles from the town. He had received a report that Bloemfontein was being strongly reinforced from the north, and with his usual promptitude and confidence had at once decided to make a dash for the possession of the town before its defences were strengthened, or before—in the event of evacuation—all its supplies and rolling-stock could be removed. This last, indeed, was a consideration of the first importance, for, in the event of delay in reopening the line to Norval's Pont, the very existence of the army might depend on what it found in Bloemfontein.

French reaches railway and promptly selects objective for attack.

At 1 P.M. French marched off with Porter's and Alderson's brigades, leaving Broadwood to follow later on. Three hours' going in a burning sun brought the column a mile west of Ferreira Siding, nearly 30 miles from the bivouac at Doornboom. Here French heard that the Boers were intrenched near the base of Brand Kop, and that several trains had just passed on their way south to bring back the commandos at

Norval's Pont. A detachment was sent to the right to cut the railway at Leeuwberg. French himself at once hurried forward towards Brand Kop with the mounted troops, leaving the weary batteries to crawl on after as best they could. The Boers were soon found in positions on both sides of the railway. French, who was with the reconnoitring line, ordered Major Allenby, with the advanced guard squadron of the Greys, to seize a ridge 2,000 yards south of the Brand Kop. This was done without difficulty, and the squadron was reinforced by a company of M.I., and later by "Q" Battery, which drew the fire of a pom-pom on the Brand Kop. The main body was meanwhile moving up close to the railway. It was now 5 P.M., and there was no time for delay if the position was to be taken at all. French had already made up his mind what to do, and had selected as his objective a long, low ridge extending eastwards from the railway opposite the Brand Kop. It was evidently held, but probably not in force, and might be captured by a bold dash.

Scobell seizes the position. Railway cut N. of Bloemfontein.

A squadron of Greys under Major Scobell was sent across the line with orders to rush the ridge at all hazards. Coming under fire from the western end of the ridge, Scobell swung off to the right, galloped to the eastern end, dismounted his men—some 60 in all—and clambered up to the top. Meanwhile, a squadron of Roberts's Horse had been sent to seize a kopje opposite the centre of the ridge, and the rest of the force moved up in readiness to support. Seeing these movements, unable, perhaps, in the waning evening light to estimate the weakness of the attacking force, the Heidelbergers under Weilbach, some 400–500 of whom held the ridge, were seized with panic and bolted. As they ran down the back of the hill they were met by a reinforcement of several hundred men, who attempted to rally them. Scobell, reaching the summit, found it unoccupied, but, hearing voices beyond the far crest, ran across with less than 30 men. Here he saw the crowd of Boers below expostulating and arguing with each other as to whether the ridge should be reoccupied or not. A few volleys produced immediate unanimity, and the Boers galloped away into the twilight. The key to Bloemfontein was won. It was by no means securely held yet, and Scobell

spent an anxious night, the only reinforcement he received being a handful of Rimington's Guides. No counter-attack was, however, made, and before dawn Porter had occupied the position with his whole brigade. During ten night, Major Hunter-Weston, R.E., with a party of ten mounted sappers, guided by a Mr. Hogg, rode right round the east of Bloemfontein, and at 4.30 A.M. blew up a culvert on the railway north of the town, and cut the telegraph-wires. After scaring away a Boer patrol by a bold charge, the gallant little party safely returned to camp. Hunter-Weston's feat proved of the very greatest service to Roberts's future operations. A great many trains, indeed, had already got away earlier in the night, but 11 immediately serviceable engines and over 100 trucks were secured, and were to be called into use almost at once. Altogether, thanks to his own resolute leading, and the enterprise of his subordinates, French had performed the task allotted to him with signal success. The capture of Bloemfontein—for such it really was—was a fitting completion to the series of marches which relieved Kimberley and ensured the success of Paardeberg.

The Boers abandon the defence and retire during the night.

In the Boer ranks the news that the British had turned their position, and now held the approaches to the town within easy artillery range, caused a general panic. A *Krygsraad*, which assembled on the evening of the 12th, still decided, for form's sake, that Roberts's entry should not be allowed to take place unopposed. But no one took it very seriously, except the inhabitants of Bloemfontein themselves, who were full of indignation at the idea that their pretty little town should be a target for British shells, or looted by an infuriated soldiery. Their anxiety was quickened by a skilful proclamation which Roberts had issued at Aasvogel Kop, and which French had caused to be conveyed into the town by a prisoner that afternoon, promising all protection to the inhabitants if his entry were unopposed, but adding that resistance would probably mean damage to the town and loss of life. Moreover, Bloemfontein contained many English, and was the headquarters of the moderate party, of the men who had from the first been strongly opposed to the misguided policy which had plunged the Free State into an unnecessary war,

and were only too anxious that a peaceful entry of the British troops should be followed by a general conclusion of hostilities. The project of resistance soon vanished away, and all night through the commandos and their convoys moved away to the north. Steyn himself and the more prominent members of the party of continued resistance left by train late in the evening. Only a weak rearguard lingered behind to check any possible pursuit, and a number of Theron's Scouts remained in the town in disguise to secure information for the next phase of the campaign.

March 13. Roberts's entry into Bloemfontein.

The cavalry soon discovered, on the morning of the 13th, that no serious opposition was intended. Desultory firing went on for two or three hours as they occupied the Brand Kop, and pushed round to the east of the town. Streams of retreating burghers and wagons could still be seen not so very many miles off, and exhausted as the cavalry were, and incapable of any sustained effort, they might still, in all probability, have effected some useful captures. Roberts had been apprised of French's success by midnight, and, starting at 5 A.M. with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, reached the railway, within view of the town, about 11 A.M. Some time before this, three newspaper correspondents, enterprising as ever, had ridden straight into the town. At the club they found the principal citizens assembled, waiting for the British to come in. At their suggestion, the Mayor, Dr. Kellner, the Landdrost, Mr. Papenfus, and Mr. J. G. Fraser,* of the Executive Council, drove out and formally presented the keys of the town to the British Field-Marshal in token of submission. Soon after 1 P.M. Roberts rode into Bloemfontein at the head of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade. To the surprise of the victors, who had scarcely realized to what extent Bloemfontein was an English town, they found, not a sullen, deserted city, but streets brightly decorated with British flags, and cheering crowds. The entry of the conquering army resembled a holiday procession rather than the enforced submission to the yoke of an invader. Outside the Presidency the cavalcade halted while the little silken Union Jack, worked by Lady Roberts, was run up on the flagstaff.

* See vol. i., pp. 95, 189.

After 46 years the flag of England was once more flying in the capital of the old "Sovereignty."

Arrival of infantry. Pole-Carew sent to Norval's Pont by train. March 15.

At 6 P.M. the Guards arrived, having covered over 36 miles in the last 26 hours, but none the less too late to enable Roberts to fulfil his promise to march in at their head. The Ninth Division marched to Ferreira Siding. The Sixth Division, who were delayed by the care of the siege guns and ammunition park, only came in next day. The grimed, tattered, and dusty battalions, who had borne the brunt of the fighting from start to finish, stepped out proudly as they marched through the Free State capital, to whose capture their efforts had so largely contributed. The Seventh Division reached Poundisford Farm, west of Ferreira Siding, on the 16th, and remained there. For the moment no further operations on a large scale were in contemplation, and the troops were allowed a well-earned rest, while Roberts devoted his attention to the restoration of railway communication with Cape Colony, and to the preparations for his next great move. On the 15th a small force under Pole-Carew, consisting of the Grenadiers and Scots Guards, four guns 84th Battery, some M.I. and engineers, was sent down in four trains to "clear the country" towards Bethulie and Norval's Pont. To send a few hundred men by train to clear a hundred miles of country which no British troops had yet traversed was, indeed, an unprecedented performance. But Roberts's confidence in the effects of his strategy was fully justified, and no trace of opposition was met with. At Edenburg, where the trains "bivouacked" for the night, a deputation of the leading inhabitants met Pole-Carew, and before the trains left, the field-cornets and commandant of the district came to tender their submission, and promised to surrender their arms on the 25th, a promise which was, in fact, kept. A single company was left in Edenburg as garrison, and Pole-Carew steamed on to Springfontein, where he heard that 3,000 Boers with 300 wagons had passed through in the direction of Ladybrand only 36 hours before. He had not been in Springfontein for an hour before some of Gatacre's scouts marched in from Bethulie. At Donkerpoort the train

met the advanced guard of Clements's force, which had crossed the Orange River on the previous day.

Clements's advance to Norval's Pont and Bloemfontein.

The doings of these last-mentioned forces before they joined hands with Pole-Carew require some brief account. Starting from Colesberg on March 3, as already related, Clements had pushed forward slowly, repairing the broken bridges and culverts on the railway as he went along. The last Boer detachments crossed over to the north bank on the 5th. On the following day three spans of the great railway bridge at Norval's Pont were destroyed; the Colesberg wagon bridge followed suit a few days later. Clements meanwhile pushed on to the river, and posted his troops in positions commanding all the drifts for some miles above and below Norval's Pont. But he made no attempt to force a crossing —not even when, on the 11th and 12th, it became obvious that the Boers were in full retreat—till the railway line was complete down to the river. By the 15th, however, all was ready, and on that day he threw a pontoon bridge 266 yards long over the river. During the next few days the bulk of his force crossed over, and on the 21st he started on a military promenade through the south-western Free State. Marching through Philippolis, Jagersfontein, Fauresmith, Koffyfontein, and Petrusburg, he collected surrendered arms, distributed proclamations, addressed local notables, and eventually, on April 4, arrived at Bloemfontein.

Gatacre's and Brabant's troops save the road bridges at Bethulie and Aliwal North.

Gatacre, after occupying Stormberg on March 5, moved on two days later to Burghersdorp, which his scouts had entered on the 6th. On the 8th Captain McNeill, with 30 of his scouts, pushed hard on the trail of the retreating Boers for 45 miles, arriving within a mile of Bethulie bridges at 1.30 A.M. on the 9th. The scouts were too few to prevent the Boers blowing up the railway bridge that afternoon. But at 10 P.M. Major Neylan arrived with some Cape Police, and at daybreak on the 10th the united party, even now a mere handful, seized a farm completely commanding the road bridge, and held on, under heavy shell and rifle-fire, till the arrival of Gatacre's advanced guard at noon. The bridge was mined, but the British fire kept the Boers from completing the electric connections at its northern end. More

troops came up on the 11th, and that evening Lieutenant Popham, of the Derbyshires, with four men, removed some boxes of dynamite off the bridge under a sharp fire; later in the night Captain P. S. Grant, R.E., cut the wires, and threw into the river the dynamite which had been placed on the piers. Gatacre meanwhile pushed up the rest of his force, and repaired the railway, which had been seriously damaged along the whole 70 to 80 miles from Molteno to the river. At Bethulie firing went on for some days, but on the evening of the 14th, on receipt of the news of Roberts's entry into Bloemfontein, the Boers retreated, and the next day Bethulie was occupied by the British. That same day Captain Hennessey, of the Cape Police, and Captain Turner, of De Montmorency's Scouts, hearing that the railway was intact to Springfontein, rode the 30 miles to the junction on a trolley, surprised eight Boers asleep in the station and disarmed them, and next day brought back to Bethulie two engines and over 40 trucks, the prize of their daring exploit. Brabant had halted for a day after his success at Labuschagne's Nek, but on the 7th he pushed on, and next day occupied Jamestown without opposition. On the 10th he marched off again, and on the 11th the advanced squadrons of Brabant's Horse reached a rise above Aliwal North. Boer tents were visible on the north bank, but, trusting to fortune, Major Henderson dashed down the hill, through the picturesque little town, and over the bridge. Before the Boers, under Olivier, who were in much superior strength, knew what was happening, the Colonials had securely intrenched themselves on the north bank, and successfully beat off all attempts to dislodge them. For the next three days Brabant confined himself to holding the bridge-head thus gallantly secured. On the 15th Olivier, too, retreated. Soon after the retreat began, some 300 Cape rebels thought better of their decision to march north with him, turned back, and marched up to the Aliwal Court House to surrender.

Retreat of the southern Boer commandos. Collapse of western rebellion.

On the evening of the 13th the remnant of the Colesberg commandos, still fully 3,000 strong, under Grobler and Lemmer, reached Springfontein. Next day they set off eastwards, passing by Smithfield and Wepener. On the 17th

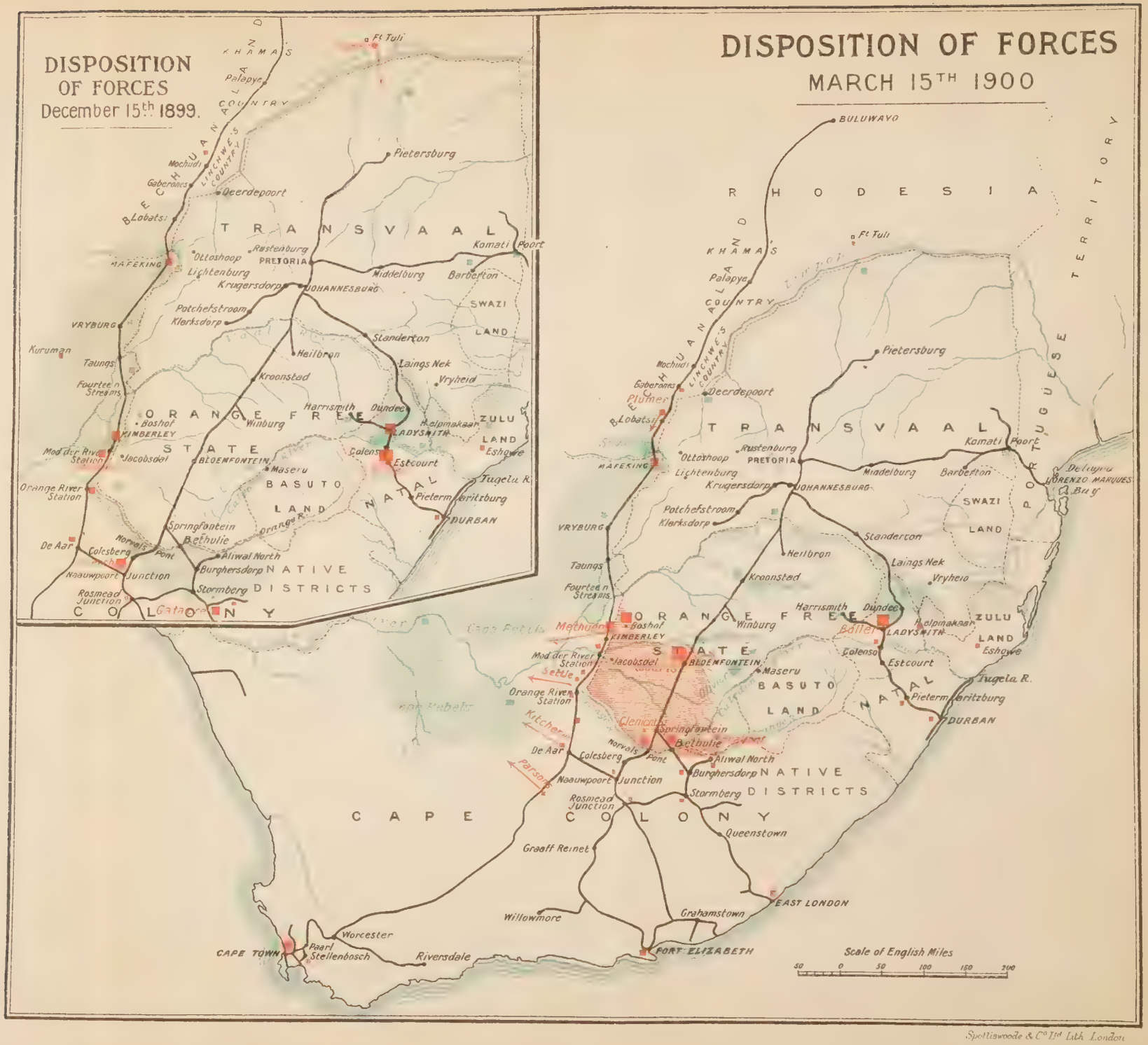
they were joined by the commandos from Bethulie and Aliwal North under Du Plessis and Olivier, and the whole united force of 6,000–7,000 men, with its 800 wagons and 10,000 oxen, stretching over 24 miles of road, pushed steadily northwards along the Basuto border. Here we must leave them toiling along, with cracking of whips and shouts of Kaffir drivers and clouds of all-enveloping red dust, their anxiety increasing from day to day as they came closer to Bloemfontein. How they ran the gauntlet of Roberts's exhausted and demobilized force, and successfully rejoined their comrades, will be related in the next volume. To that volume, too, must be relegated the narrative of the expedition against the western rebels. For the present purpose it is sufficient to say that the columns under Kitchener's directions successfully occupied Prieska a week after Roberts's entry into Bloemfontein. The moment the back of the rebellion was broken Kitchener hurried back to Bloemfontein to assist in the preparations for the next great advance, while Settle completed the subjugation of the country, occupying Upington and Kenhardt, driving Liebenberg and his Transvaalers across the Orange River with such of the more determined rebels as chose to follow them, and accepting the submission of the rest.

The whole face of the war changed.

In a few brief weeks, crowded with stirring events, the whole face of the war had been changed. The beginning of February had found the Boers with an almost unbroken record of successes, waiting with quiet confidence to reap the fruit of those successes in the approaching fall of Kimberley and Ladysmith, in the consequent spread of rebellion over all South Africa, and in the intervention of the European Powers. The middle of March saw Lord Roberts in Bloemfontein, Ladysmith and Kimberley relieved, and the whole vast region south of these points in uncontested occupation of the British troops. Four thousand Boers had been captured in the field. Fully twice that number of combatants were now submissively handing in their rifles to the nearest British officer or magistrate in exchange for passes, and returning to their farms; the rebels to await such punishment as the clemency of the British Government might feel

DIRECTIONS.

- British Forces.
- Boer Forces.
- Republican territory in British occupation
- British territory in Boer occupation.



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FACSIMILE OF CARD

ISSUED AFTER THE OCCUPATION OF BLOEMFONTEIN GIVING THE RETURN OF LORD ROBERTS'S FORCE & THE NAMES OF THE PRINCIPAL COMMANDERS & STAFF OFFICERS

RETURN OF TROOPS MARCHING INTO BLOEMFONTEIN ON ITS SURRENDER... 13TH MARCH 1900.

Unit	Officers	W. & N.C.O. and Men	Horses	Guns
Army H^d Q^{rs} Staff	50	65	73	"
Cavalry Div^n				
Divisional Staff	13	40	66	..
1st Cav. Bde. Staff	6	14	22	..
6th Dragoon G^{ds}	20	333	300	1×
2nd Dragoons	19	311	321	1×
6th Dragoons (Det)	4	46	49	..
14th Hussars (Det)	7	108	74	..
N.S. Wales L^{crs}	6	89	90	..
"Q" Batt: R.H.A.	5	147	154	6
"T" Batt: R.H.A.	5	148	139	6
"U" Batt: R.H.A.	5	142	154	6
Ammunition Col^n	4	72	32	..
Field Hospital	2	20	30	..
Bearer Company	2	15	23	..
Bde D^n Staff R.H.A	4	16	18	..
1st Australian H	5	112	101	..
2nd Cav. Bde Staff	4	13	20	..
Household Cav^y	22	291	292	.
10th Hussars	26	386	414	1×
12th Lancers	20	288	265	..
Staff Bde D^n R.H.A	4	15	21	..
G. Batt: R.H.A.	5	147	139	6
P. Batt: R.H.A	5	145	130	6
Ammunition Col^n	2	43	36	..
Field Hospital	3	16	25	..
Bearer Company	3	46		..
Field $Hosp^l$ (Attd)	2	15	19	..
——				
3rd Cav: Bde: Staff	4	10	15	..
9th Lancers	21	337	316	1×
16th Lancers	24	373	368	2×
Staff Bde D^n R.H.A	4	10	15	..
"O" Batt: R.H.A	5	154	142	6
"R" Batt: R.H.A.	7	163	153	6
Ammunition Col^n	2	94	40	.
Left ½ No. 11 Field H^o	2	16	2	..
No. 9 Bearer C^{oy}	3	42	6	..
C. C^o A.S. Corps	2	28	13	..
Field Troop R.E.	7	117	104	..
B. C^o Transport	3	21	12	..
C. Do. Do.	2	11	13	..
D Do Do	1	12	8	..
L Do Do	3	9	6	..
S Do Do	2	33	20	..
Aldersons M.I.				
1st M.I. Reg^t	21	404	423	3×
3rd M.I. Reg^t	12	195	228	..
Roberts Horse	35	353	387	..
N. Zealand M.R.	5	60	72	..
Rimington's Guides	7	102	110	

Unit	Officers	W. & N.C.O. and Men	Horses	Guns
Le Gallais' M.I.				
Staff	3	10	13	..
6th M.I. Regt.	13	391	330	..
8th M.I. Regt	15	311	254	..
City Imp: Vol:	11	185	145	..
Kitcheners H^o	26	402	270	2+
Nesbitt's H^e	8	119	136	..
N.S. Wales M.I.	22	408	345	..
H. C^o $Transp^t$ A.S.C	2	23	317	..
Supply Det: A.S.C	1	2	1	..
Martyr's M.I.				
Staff	3	–	6	..
2nd M.I. Regt.	18	483	489	..
4th M.I. Regt.	15	327	251	..
Burmah C^{os} M.I.	17	292	332	..
1st Queensland M.I.	8	184	211	..
2nd Queensland M.I.	8	128	158	..
Ridley's M.I.				
Staff	3	1	9	..
5th M.I. Regt..	12	287	276	..
7th M.I. Regt	17	337	262	..
1st C. $Grahamst^n$ Vol	12	243	231	..
Ceylon M.I.	6	85	109	..
F. C^o $Transp^t$ A.S.C.	2	31	20	..
Supply Det A.S.C	1	8	–	..
R^l Naval B^{de}	33	393	10	7+
G. in C's Body G^d	1	43	53	..
Staff Howitzers	6	15	14	..
15 (S.T.) C^{os} S.D.R.G.A	5	138	7	4‡
Ox Amm^n Reserve	1	2	2	..
9th Field C^o R.E.	7	161	14	..
1st Tel: D^n R.E.	4	112	34	..
Guards B^{de}				
Brigade Staff	4	26	11	.
3rd B^n Gren. G^{ds}	26	899	8	1×
1st B^n $Coldst^m$ G^{ds}	25	927	8	1×
2nd B^n $Coldst^m$ G^{ds}	20	858	8	1×
1st B^n Scots G^{ds}	15	516	6	1×
G^{ds} B^{de} F $Hosp^l$	4	33	7	..
——— Bearer C^o	2	52	4	..
——— Supply Det:	1	16	2	..
11th C^o A.S.C.	2	19	19	..
VIth Division				
Div^l Staff	15	53	54	..
B^{de} D^n Staff R.F.A	3	2	5	..
76 Batt: R.F.A.	5	46	88	6φ
81st Batt: R.F.A	4	79	73	6φ
82nd Do Do	5	99	94	6φ

Unit	Officers	W. & N.C.O. and Men	Horses	Guns
65th How: Batt:	5	169	162	6
R.E. Staff	2	5	4	..
38th C^o R.E.	6	131	19	..
13th Bde Staff	3	19	7	..
2nd B^n E. Kent R.	10	560	8	1+
2nd B^n $Glouc^r$ R.	22	563	8	..
1st W. Riding R.	18	593	5	..
1st Oxford L.I.	15	424	7	..
13th Bearer C^o	2	39	4	..
Supply Det A.S.C.	1	15	2	..
18th Bde Staff	4	37	7	..
2nd R. Warwick R.	20	834	7	1+
1st Yorks: R.	12	705	4	1×
1st Welsh: R.	11	654	7	1+
1st Essex: R.	12	738	4	1+
18th Field $Hosp^l$	4	32	1	..
18th Bearer C^o	2	24	..	..
VIIth Division				
Div^l Staff	11	77	43	..
B^{de} D^n Staff R.F.A.	4	8	18	..
18th Batt: R.F.A.	5	134	113	6φ
62nd Do. Do.	5	128	113	6φ
75th Do. Do.	5	141	122	6φ
No. 1 Amm^n Col:	3	102	78	..
"A" Sec: 1 P^{dr} Maxims	2	27	29	3+
26th C^o F^d R.E.	7	126	18	..
Div^n Supply Det.	1	30	21	..
14th Bde: Staff	3	15	7	..
2nd Norfolk R.	16	763	5	1+
2nd Lincoln R.	19	752	6	1+
1st K.O.S. $Bord^{rs}$	22	803	5	1+
2nd Hants R..	18	578	5	1+
14th B^{de} F. $Hosp^l$	5	31	33	..
14th Bde Bearer C^o	3	54	4	..
Supply Det: A.S.C.	1	7	1	..
14th $Transp^t$ C^o do.	2	25	14	..
15th B^{de} Staff	4	19	8	..
2nd Cheshire R.	22	688	6	1+
2nd S. Wales Bord:	22	795	5	1+
1st E. Lanc: R	19	695	6	1+
2nd N. Stafford R	19	737	8	1+
15th B^{de} Bearer C^o	3	48	4	..
15th F^d $Hosp^l$	4	31	5	..
Supply Det. A.S.C.	1	9	11	..
15th $Transp^t$ C^o	2	9	8	..
IXth Division				
Div^l Staff	10	50	32	..
Staff B. D^n R.F.A.	3	13	13	..
83rd Batt: R.F.A.	5	156	127	6φ
84th D^o D^o	5	158	131	6φ
85th Do. D^o	5	167	131	6φ
Amm^n Column	6	120	88	..
7th F^d C^o R.E.	6	163	35	..
Highland B^{de} Staff	4	43	10	..
1st A. & S. $High^{lrs}$	14	637	7	1+
2nd R^l $High^{lrs}$	13	513	7	1+
2nd Seaforth H^{rs}	12	538	7	1+
Field Hospital	4	27	5	..
Bearer $Comp^y$	2	45	3	..

Unit	Officers	W. & N.C.O. and Men	Horses	Guns
XIXth B^{de} Staff	3	26	8	..
2nd D. of C^{orn} L.I.	15	654	5	1+
2nd Shrops L.I.	19	739	5	1+
1st Gordon H^{rs}	19	738	7	1+
R^l Canadian R.	30	745	9	2+
Y. $Transp^t$ C. A.S.C	1	33	18	–
Supply Det: A.S.C.	1	16	1	..
Bearer $Comp^y$	4	65	6	..
Field $Hosp^l$	4	33	5	–
Supply Park A.S.C.				
No. 1 Section	..	5	..	..
" 22 Unit	1	5	1	..
" 25 Unit	2	6	2	..
" 29 Unit	2	8	2	..
" 5 Company	..	3	..	..
" 21. Do.	..	3	..	..
" 29. Do.	..	3	..	..
" 34 Do:	..	1	..	..
1st Balloon Sec: R.E.	2	27	10	..
Grand Total	1405	32,549	11540	39 Machine; 54–15 P^{rs}; Guns; 42–12 P^{rs}; 3–Naval 12 P^{rs}, 4–4.7" Naval Guns 6–5" Howitzer. 4–6" Howitzers.

\+ 4–4.7 Guns
3–12 P^r
‡ 4–6" Howitzers
φ 15. P^{rs}
× Machine Guns

Government House,
BLOEMFONTEIN.

W.F. Kelly
MAJOR-GENERAL,
D.A. GENERAL, S.A. FIELD FORCE.

constrained to impose; the Free Staters under oath to abstain from all further participation in the war. The main body of the Boer forces had fled from Bloemfontein in headlong rout, and seemed to have almost completely dispersed, leaving a mere remnant to contest a further British advance. The commandos trekking up past Bloemfontein were, one might not unreasonably infer, only hurrying to get safely to their own districts before undergoing the same process of dispersion. There was much, indeed, in all this that was deceptive. Elephant guns from the days of the Great Trek, and well-worn sporting rifles, swelled the returns of arms surrendered, but were hardly proof of complete disarmament. Oaths were easy things to swear, and to elastic consciences their fulfilment depended on circumstances. The vanishing commandos had been allowed to disperse designedly, and were soon to return rested, refitted, and inspired with a more hopeful spirit. None the less the change in the military situation was complete. And it was final. The week that followed the entry into Bloemfontein marked a great and signal triumph. The fulness of that triumph was to be marred, ere long, by more than one untoward incident. Two whole years of struggle were to pass before the seal was finally set upon complete achievement. But the strategical results secured were real and substantial for all that; the grip, once gained, was never relaxed.

Lord Roberts's achievement

This was Lord Roberts's work. To him, and to no one else, England owed this great result. Circumstances may seem to have favoured him; each one of his successes owed much to the skill or determination of his subordinates. But it was he, the man himself, who seized the favouring chance and directed it to his ends, whose bold designs furnished skill with meet occasion, whose quick spirit kindled a responsive fire. Boldness of conception, singleness of aim, fervour in execution, fearlessness of responsibility—these were the qualities Roberts brought to bear upon a situation fatally compromised and entangled by original unpreparedness and subsequent failure, and it was by these that he turned defeat into victory. Whether, without him, the tide would not have turned of itself; whether the increase of the British

forces and their gradual acquisition of experience would not, in the end, have worn down the Boer resistance, is a matter for conjecture. Such conjecture, indeed, might equally suggest that, in the meantime, Ladysmith and Kimberley would have fallen, that with their fall the Boer forces might once more have taken the offensive, that their numbers might have been doubled by the spread of rebellion, that the stream of British reinforcements might have been arrested by the outbreak of a great European war. What is certain is that a victory was very essential to England at that moment—to apply the words used by Jervis on the morning of St. Vincent—and that Roberts secured that victory for her.

The nature of the task.

That victory may seem, now, to have been but an easy thing. What was there, after all, so very difficult in marching rapidly across a hundred miles of open country, opposed by an enemy greatly inferior in numbers, devoid of enterprise, and slow of perception? The answer to part of this question has been given in an earlier chapter, which was intended to bring out clearly the labour involved in the preparation for such a march, and the dangers and doubts besetting its inception. For the rest of the answer the reader need only compare the chapters describing the execution of Roberts's plan with those that deal with other operations not inherently more difficult. What distinguished the relief of Kimberley and the occupation of Bloemfontein from the relief of Ladysmith was not the difference in the character of the country in which these operations were executed, but the manner of their execution. To understand this we have only to suppose the one executed in the spirit of the other. Suppose that Roberts had spent four days inactive at Ramdam—either to accumulate supplies, or because the weather was too hot—while the Boers intrenched a new Magersfontein across the Riet. Suppose that he had then waited a week at Waterval Drift, while Kitchener, in charge of the main body of troops at De Kiel's, superintended the crossing of his wagons, and kept French guarding the laager, while he methodically bombarded the veld in front of him. Would he have found it so simple to mystify or surprise the Boers? Would the plains and low kopjes of the Free State have proved any easier to

cross than the lofty hills of Natal? Would the following up of success at a speed of two miles a day have caught Cronje? Would full rations and tents have enabled Roberts's transport to carry his force to Bloemfontein? It is needless to pursue the comparison into details. What led to failure after failure in the one case was not the Tugela, with its barrier of hills, but slowness, half-heartedness, hesitation, feebleness of purpose; what constituted success in the other was not the open veld, but clearness of vision, undaunted resolution, and boundless energy.

Whatever his failings Roberts more than England deserved.

In one respect, indeed, Roberts's execution fell short of the boldness of his own conceptions. Alike at Paardeberg and at Poplar Grove, we have seen how the fear of heavy losses curtailed victory of its full reward, and set fatal precedents for the future. To some extent this fear, in Roberts, was but an exaggerated manifestation of the reaction against the blundering tactics of some of the earlier battles, of the desire to assert intellect against mere force, of the whole spirit, in fact, which inspired his strategy. But the real cause of the evil lay deeper; it was rooted in the prevailing sentiments and prejudices of the army and of the nation. A nation which had long banished all serious thoughts of war, and of the meaning of war, from its mind—an army unequipped with the truly practical experience which comes from historical study and scientific reflection—possessed no standard by which to judge of such questions. That in this one respect Roberts proved himself unable to rise above the limitations of his environment, must detract from the fulness of his fame as a general. It ought not to lessen the gratitude due from his countrymen to one who so greatly transcended the standard of generalship England deserved to find in her commanders; who, by his courage and energy, turned humiliation into triumph; who averted a disaster which might have proved fatal to the nascent hope of Imperial unity.

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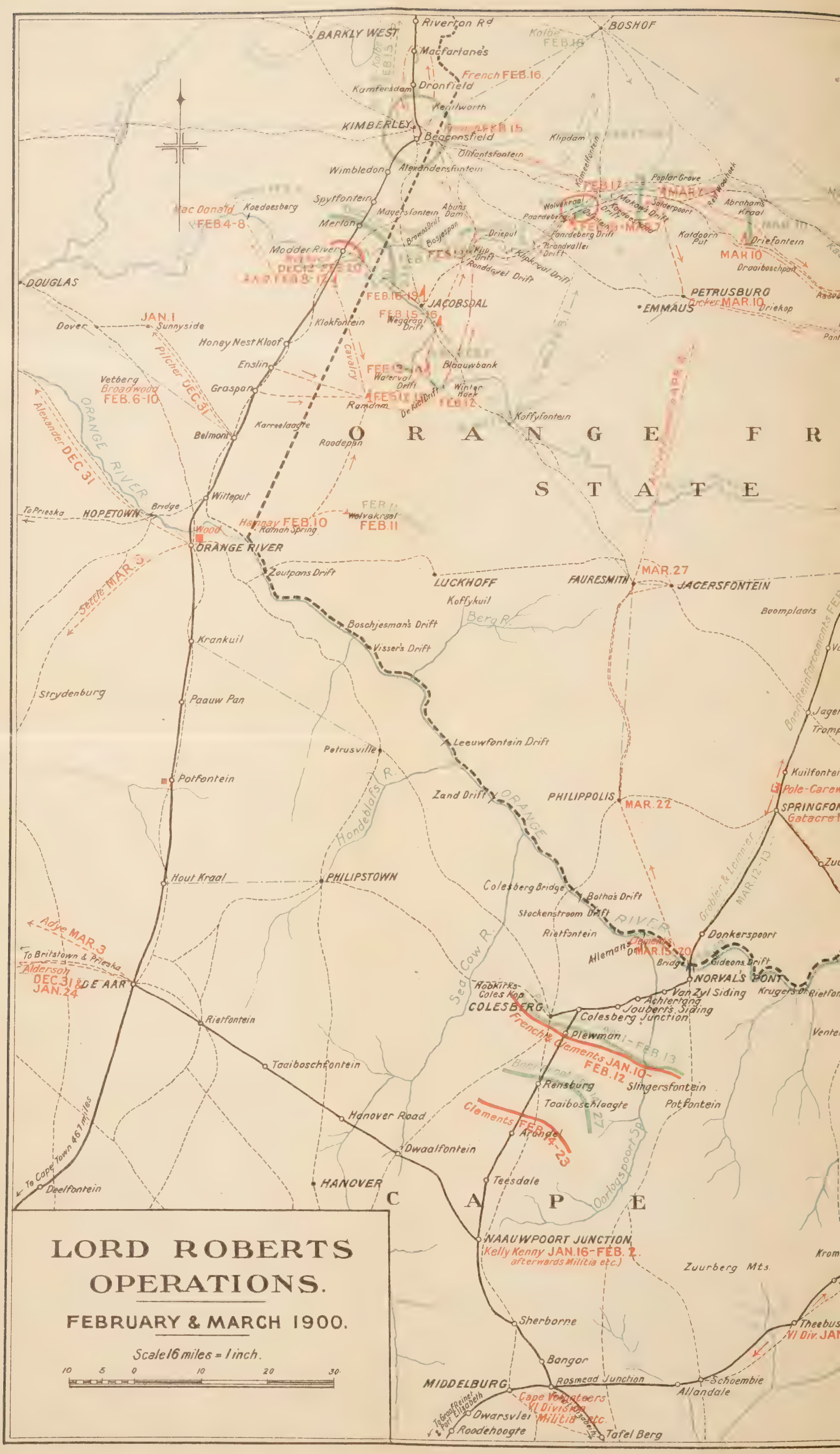
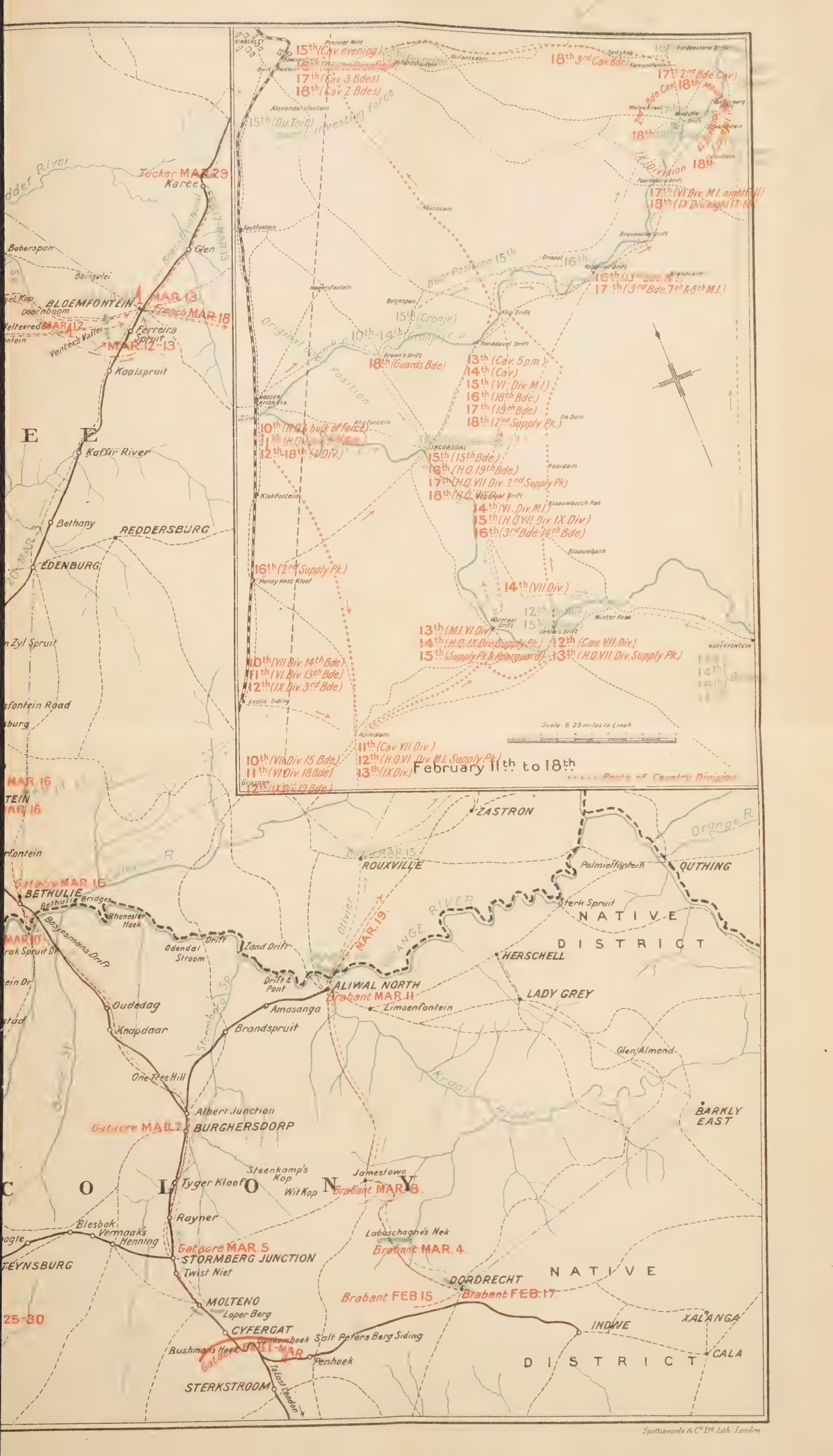

DIRECTIONS.
British
Boers
Telegraph lines (exclusive of lines along railway.)
LORD ROBERTS OPERATIONS.
FEBRUARY & MARCH 1900.
Scale 16 miles = 1 inch.
10 5 0 10 20 30
ORANGE FR
STATE
CAPE
BARKLY WEST
Riverton Rd
BOSHOF
Macfarlane's
French FEB.16
Dronfield
Kamfersdam
Kenilworth
KIMBERLEY
Beaconsfield
Klipdam
Olifantsfontein
Wimbledon
Alexandersfontein
Spytfontein
Mac Donald FEB.4-8
Koedoesberg
Merton
Modder River
DOUGLAS
Dover
JAN.1 Sunnyside
Honey Nest Kloof
Enslin
Vetberg
Broadwood FEB.6-10
Graspan
Pilcher DEC.31
Alexander DEC.31
ORANGE RIVER
Belmont
Karreelaagte
Roodepan
Witteput
To Prieska
HOPETOWN
Bridge
Wood
Hannay FEB.10
Ramah Spring
Wolvekraal FEB.11
ORANGE RIVER
Zoutpans Drift
Settle MAR.3
Krankuil
Strydenburg
Paauw Pan
Potfontein
Hout Kraal
PHILIPSTOWN
Adye MAR.3
To Britstown & Prieska
Alderson DEC.31 & JAN.24
DE AAR
Rietfontein
Taaiboschfontein
Hanover Road
Dwaalfontein
HANOVER
To Cape Town 467 miles
Deelfontein
Klokfontein
Cavalry
JACOBSDAL
Blaauwbank
Koffyfontein
Ramdam
Waterval Drift
Wegdraai Drift
Klipkraal Drift
Ronddavel Drift
Brandvallei Drift
Paardeberg Drift
Wolvekraal
Poplar Grove
Abrahams Kraal
Katdoorn Put
Driefontein
MAR.10
Draaiboschpan
PETRUSBURG
Tucker MAR.10
Driekop
EMMAUS
Blaauwbank
Winter Hoek
Koffyfontein
LUCKHOFF
Koffykuil
Berg R.
Boschjesman's Drift
Visser's Drift
Leeuwfontein Drift
Petrusville
Zand Drift
ORANGE RIVER
Hondeblaf's R.
FAURESMITH
MAR.27
JACERSFONTEIN
Boomplaats
PHILIPPOLIS
MAR.22
Kuilfontein
Pole-Carew
SPRINGFON
Gatacre
Colesberg Bridge
Botha's Drift
Stockenstroom Drift
Rietfontein
Allemans Drift
Clements MAR.15-20
Bridge
Donkerspoort
Gideons Drift
NORVAL'S PONT
Van Zyl Siding
Achtertang
Jouberts Siding
Colesberg Junction
Hobkirks-Coles Kop
COLESBERG
Sea Cow R.
French & Clements JAN.10-FEB.12
Plewman
Rensburg
Taaiboschlaagte
Slingersfontein
Potfontein
Clements FEB.14-23
Arundel
Teesdale
Oorlogspoort Sp.
NAAUWPOORT JUNCTION
Kelly Kenny JAN.16-FEB.2. afterwards Militia etc.)
Zuurberg Mts.
Sherborne
Bangor
MIDDELBURG
Rosmead Junction
Schoembie
Allandale
Theebus
VI Div. JAN
Cape Volunteers VI Division Militia etc.
Dwarsvlei
Roodehoogte
Tafel Berg
To Graaf Reinet & Port Elizabeth
Grobler & Lemmer
MAR.12-13
Boer Reinforcements FEB
Jager
Tromp
Vente
Krom


Tucker MAR.29
Karee
Glen
MAR.13
Baberspan
Bainsvlei
BLOEMFONTEIN
MAR.13
French MAR.18
Veltevreden MAR.12
Ferreira Spruit
Venteks Vallei
MAR.12-13
Kaalspruit
Kaffir River
Bethany
REDDERSBURG
EDENBURG
Zyl Spruit
fontein Road
sburg
MAR.16
TEIN
MAR.16
rfontein
Gatacre MAR.16
BETHULIE
Bethulie Bridges
Rhenoster Hoek
Boojesmans Drift
Odendal Stroom
Drift
Zand Drift
Oudedag
Knapdaar
Amasanga
Brandspruit
Drift & Pont
ALIWAL NORTH
Brabant MAR.11
Zimoenfontein
Stormberg Sp
One Tree Hill
Albert Junction
Gatacre MAR.2
BURGHERSDORP
Steenkamp's Kop
Tyger Kloof
Wit Kop
Jamestown
Brabant MAR.8.
Rayner
Blesbok
Vermaaks
Henning
Gatacre MAR.5
STORMBERG JUNCTION
Twist Niet
TEYNSBURG
MOLTENO
Loper Berg
CYFERGAT
Bushman's Hoek
Penhoek
Salt Peters Berg Siding
STERKSTROOM
To East London
Labuschagne's Nek
Brabant MAR.4.
DORDRECHT
Brabant FEB.15
Brabant FEB.17
INDWE
XALANGA
CALA
DISTRICT
NATIVE
DISTRICT
HERSCHELL
LADY GREY
BARKLY EAST
Glen Almond
Kraai
ZASTRON
ROUXVILLE
Olivier MAR.19
Palmietfontein
QUTHING
Sterk Spruit
NATIVE
DISTRICT
Orange R.
ORANGE RIVER
Scale 6 25 miles to 1 inch
February 11th to 18th
Route of Cavalry Division
KIMBERLEY
Premier Mine
Boshof
Boshof
Olifantsdam
Spitskop
Kameelfontein
Alexandersfontein
Du Toit's
investing force
Abrahamsdam
Spytfontein
Brandwater Drift
Brandvale
Driepoot
Boer Position 15th
Boer Position
Original Boer Position
Boshof
Boer Position
Haasfontein
Boysespan
Klip Drift
Brown's Drift
Ronddavel Drift
Modder River
Klipfontein
De Dam
Klokfontein
JACOBSDAL
Rooidam
Blaauwbosch Pan
Blaauwbank
Honey Nest Kloof
Waterval Drift
De Kiel's Drift
Winter Hoek
KOFFYFONTEIN
Enslin Siding
Reindam
Graspan
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